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Beyond the Minefield

Mining, Development, and Open Moments
in Northern Sweden

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Beyond the Minefield: Mining, Development, and Open Moments in the Rural North

Abstract

In recent years mining has taken centre stage in rural development. In part, this is a consequence of the ‘green transition’, where the demand for minerals to develop new energy systems is increasing dramatically. Using ethnographic methods, I take my starting point in Storuman, a sparsely populated municipality in the rural North of Sweden where three potential mines are already reterritorialising property rights and access, and the governance of land is being reconfigured. With the aim to explore how extractive interventions shape rural places in times of transition, I ask questions about the entanglements between people and land, the reconfigurations of territory, and what large scale extractive interventions mean for the conceptualisation of rural development in Sweden and beyond.

To understand how the ‘green transition’ impacts rural areas and what the future for rural development entails, I bring together research on resource extraction, rural development, and indigeneity. By doing so, I show how the potential mines are generating open moments, where a state of uncertainty becomes a central part of life. I uncover how rather than being passive receivers of state policies, people take charge of their situation in open moments to steer the outcome of events. I argue that there is an overarching critique of how state policies and practices treat communities at the edge of the state. The core of this critique lies at the intersection of past and future, as people make sense of what unfolds in the open moment both as the latest instantiation of repression in a long history of colonial practices, and as a desire to reevaluate what development is and can be.

Keywords: Development thinking, rural development, rural spaces, territory, open moments, mining, property and access, green transition, land

Bortom gruvdriften: Landsbygdsutveckling och öppningar för omställning i norra Sverige

Abstract

Under de senaste åren har gruvor och gruvdrift fått en central plats i diskussioner om utveckling, inte minst i norra Sverige. Delvis beror detta på ”den gröna omställningen”, genom vilken efterfrågan på metaller för att utveckla nya energisystem förväntas öka. Genom etnografiska metoder tar jag sikte på Storuman, en glest befolkad Norrlandskommun där tre potentiella gruvor förändrar tillgången och rätten till mark, samtidigt som förvaltningen av mark förändras. Med målet att utforska hur gruvprojekt omformar landsbygden i tider av omställning ställer jag frågor om sammanflätningarna mellan människor och mark, territoriala förändringar och vad storskaliga utvinningsprojekt betyder för landsbygdsutveckling både i och bortom Sverige. För att undersöka och förstå hur ”den gröna omställningen” förändrar landsbygden och synen på framtida utveckling för jag samman forskning på naturresursutvinning, landsbygdsutveckling och urfolksstudier. Genom att göra det, visar jag hur de potentiella gruvorna i Storuman ger upphov till ”öppningar” (*open moments*), där en känsla av osäkerhet blir en central del av människors liv.

Jag visar att i stället för att vara passiva mottagare av statlig politik mobiliserar sig människor för att på olika sätt styra över de utkomster som synliggjorts i öppningen. Även om folk upptar olika positioner rörande gruvprojekten, visar jag på förekomsten av en övergripande kritik av hur statlig politik hanterar glesbygdsamhällen. Kärnan i denna kritik finns i mötet mellan dåtid och framtid, där människor sammankopplar en kolonial historia med en önskan att omvärdera vad utveckling är och kan vara.

Keywords: Landsbygdsutveckling, grön omställning, gruvdrift, tillgång till mark, äganderätt, mark, landsbygd, Norrland

Dedication

To Ivar, Tuva and Emma, who make all things possible

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List of Publications

This thesis is based on the work contained in the following papers, referred to by Roman numerals in the text:

- I. Arvid Stiernström, Seema Arora-Jonsson (2022). Territorial Narratives: Talking Claims in Open Moments, *Geoforum*, vol (129), pp. 74–84.
- II. Arvid Stiernström (2023). Sustainable development and sacrifice in the Rural north, *Sociologica Ruralis*, vol (00), pp. 1–22.
- III. Arvid Stiernström (2024). The green mining imperative and multiple meanings of development in rural northern Sweden, (Submitted to *Extractive Industries and Society*, 2023, returned with minor revisions).
- IV. Seema Arora-Jonsson, Arvid Stiernström (2024, forthcoming) Towards a green transition: A post- and decolonial analysis of the green state of Sweden. In: MacEachrane, M & Faye, L (Eds) *Decolonial Sweden*. New York: Routledge.

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Papers III-IV are available upon request.

The contribution of Arvid Stiernström to the papers included in this thesis was as follows:

- I. Arvid Stiernström is first author and wrote the majority of the text, with comments and feedback from Seema Arora-Jonsson. Stiernström collected the majority of the empirical material. Development of concepts, analysis and conclusions were made through discussion between Stiernström and Arora-Jonsson. Stiernström is responsible for the correspondence with the journal.
- II. Stiernström is single author. Comments and feedback were provided by Seema Arora-Jonsson and Patrik Oskarsson.
- III. Stiernström is single author. Comments and feedback were provided by Seema Arora-Jonsson and Patrik Oskarsson.
- IV. Arora-Jonsson is first author and developed the idea for the paper and the first drafts. The paper was then discussed between the co-authors. Stiernström provided comments, empirical material and developed and revised the text with comments from the editors. The text was finalised by Arora-Jonsson.

Abbreviations

BLM	Bluelake Minerals
CAB	County Administrative Boards
EAC	Environmental Administrative Court
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
CERD	United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
AE	Agnico-Eagle
MI	Mining Inspectorate
RHA	Reindeer Herding Association
SGS	Swedish Geological Survey

1. Prologue

In June 2019 I was standing on a mountainside overlooking a large lake with an island in the middle of it, a site for a proposed mine. The indigenous Sami woman and anti-mining activist who had guided me there pointed towards the island and explained that the small mountain in front of us would be completely removed if the mine would become a reality. She told me she refused to let it go that far, that she would use herself as a shield against the intrusion if necessary. It was not only a matter of environmental protection, but a struggle for survival, to safeguard a place where her children could grow up. And it was a question of having indigenous rights and alternative pathways of development recognised, paths that did not include unsustainable resource extraction.

Later that same week I spoke on the phone to a man from outside the small village Barsele. He was agitated. 'It doesn't matter what we say, they come here and take what they want anyway, so there is no point in talking about it!'. I had wanted to ask him about the mining project that was being developed close to his home and explained that one of my informants had recommended that I interview him since he had strong views on the matter. We never met in person, but for half an hour he vented his frustration over the futility of taking on the extractive projects backed by the Swedish state. He explained how the mining projects were representative of a form of colonialism where the rural inland was treated as a national smorgasbord that left only crumbs for the people living there. Yet, he felt, he had nothing to say on the matter.

Looking for someone who had close experience of living with the mining project I travelled to the village where the man on the phone lived. Outside an old, lopsided garage at the edge of the village a group of men were working on a car. Close to the fence that separated the lot from the road, an

elderly man stood, watching the trio as they worked. I walked up to the fence and presented myself and my interests in people's views on the mining projects. He smiled at me and replied 'Oh yes that would be great! Finally, we would have some real jobs again!'. We did not get any further than that, as he hurried over to the car to help the younger men with something, but I got the impression that he had conveyed everything I needed to know about the matter of the mining project that was developing just outside the village.

I walked on and came to another house where a woman was mowing her lawn and I stopped for a chat. Decidedly more talkative than her neighbour we discussed the presence of the exploration crews who worked on the mountain behind her house and how, although she thought it was good that people had employment, the mining project made life in the village uncertain. Would they be able to stay in their house? What would happen to the water? Was there any point to do house repairs? Who would benefit and who stood to lose? We looked up at the low, forest-covered mountain, bathed in sunlight.

There was no evidence of any mining activity, no explosions or sounds of heavy machinery. And yet, there seemed to be a presence there, something not yet tangible but that nevertheless shaped the everyday lives of the people living in the village. It is with these questions about the future, and reflections on the past, that this thesis on mining and development in the rural North begins.

2. Introduction

In recent years mining has taken centre stage in rural development. In part, this is a consequence of the ‘green transition’, where the demand for minerals to develop new energy systems is increasing dramatically. In this thesis I explore how extractive industry interventions and visions of development both merge and come into conflict to re-shape rural areas. Using ethnographic methods, I take my starting point in Storuman, a sparsely populated municipality in the rural North of Sweden where three potential mines are already reterritorialising property rights and access, and the governance of land is being reconfigured. As Arora-Jonsson and McAreavey (2023) point out, the rural is now transforming from a space of crisis into a site where the pursuit of a sustainable future unfolds. As I go on to show through the narrative of a ‘green transition’, rural areas are increasingly understood as sites where the good, green, and modern future can be created.

The mining projects I study have yet to become operational mines and therefore exist in a state of potentiality, that is, through company plans and resource estimation studies, through permits that contain legal claims to land, as assets held by investors on the stock market, through the mobilisation of anti-mining movements, in discussions over coffee in people’s homes, in national policy pronouncements as well as in local government strategies. While highly uncertain and still to take physical shape on the ground, the potential mines are tangible enough for people to refer to them as ‘mines’. I show how the turbulence caused by the expected coming of mining projects generate an ‘open moment’ in Storuman, a period in time marked by uncertainty when the conditions of everyday life hang in the balance as territories, the governance of resources and communities, and the future of rural development unravels and come to be questioned.

Extractive industry research in Sweden as well as across the globe (Beland Lindahl *et al.* 2016; Conde 2017; Fjellborg *et al.* 2022) has typically sought to clarify and explain different viewpoints, interests, and disputes over rights that arise around mining initiatives, especially in relation to indigenous peoples. Building on this literature, I show that these positions are not necessarily clear-cut but marked with ambiguity and internal conflict related to uncertain resource projects.

In the open moment created in Storuman, people formulated multiple ideas on development, and weighed these against the sacrifice that vast resource projects are understood to require.

I explore the positions taken both by people whose relation to the mines are clear, such as proponents or opponents of the projects, as well as those with more ambiguous attitudes and less pronounced opinions towards the mines. While acknowledging the conflicts and ambiguities related to these positions, I identify connections that tie them together. I show how people in different ways formulate a critique of state policies and practices, and how they link this to a history of internal colonialism. In doing so, the thesis opens up for alternative pathways of development beyond the dichotomies of for and against mining. To present what I have outline above, I have formulated the following aim and research questions.

2.1 Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this thesis is to *explore how extractive interventions shape rural places in times of transition*. I address this aim through three overlapping research questions:

- I. What are the entanglements between people and land that can shape rural areas in the context of the green transition?
- II. What are the new reconfigurations of territory that can come into being in the presence of extractive interventions?
- III. What does large scale extractive interventions mean for the conceptualisation of rural development across different groups?

2.2 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis begins with a background of the contemporary processes that, combined, give shape to what can be understood as the green transition in the North. The background also gives an overview of the history of land use and rights to land, which is key to understand how and why people respond in the way that they do as they face the potential mines. Here, I also give a short presentation of Swedish mining politics and the processes involved in making a mine. From there, I provide some contextual background to Storuman, the municipality where the events of this thesis take place.

In chapter 4, I present my conceptual framework, discussing my construction of ‘open moments’, conceptualisations of development, and how ideas and practices of development have shaped rural Sweden. I conclude the chapter with a discussion on territory, land, and property, which I see as being at the core of events in Storuman.

Chapter 5 gives an overview of my research design and methodology. I discuss how I operationalised my overarching aim, designed my case study, and what methods and material I used.

In the discussion that follows in chapter 6, I begin by providing insight into how history and identity shape everyday life at the edge of the state. I then analyse the open moment in Storuman, and how I came to understand it. The chapter concludes with a discussion on development, how it ties in with the mining projects but also how contesting narratives of development emerged in the field.

In the concluding chapter 7, I summarise my insights and use them to consider the future of rural development in Sweden. The thesis ends with a summary of the four papers.

3. Background: A Golden Opportunity for Northern Sweden?

On the 11th of January 2023, the Swedish ministers of energy and enterprise, employment and integration, and infrastructure jointly published an opinion piece in Sweden's leading finance- and industry-focussed daily newspaper, *Dagens Industri*. The topic of the article was to present the government's new strategy concerning the neo-industrialisation of the Swedish North:

There exists a golden opportunity for the North of Sweden to lead the new industrial revolution and become an engine for green innovations that can benefit the northernmost Sweden, the nation, and, by extension, the whole of Europe. The northern region's resources in the form of rivers, ore, and forest constitute the basis of the [green] transition that creates jobs, competitiveness, and strengthens the possibilities to lead a good life for the people living in these areas. (Busch *et al.* 2023)

Taken in its entirety the article suggests that the rural North is key in the realisation of a bright, green, sustainable, not to mention golden, future. Sustainability has become the way to make money and provide jobs for rural areas of Sweden in the 2020s. The article goes on to highlight the challenges that need to be addressed to seize this 'golden opportunity', one of which is the need to make it easier to open new mines in the region. Mining, it is stated, is crucial to the 'green transition'¹ which depends on the extraction of mineral resources needed for 'green technologies' such as electric cars, wind power plants, and solar panels. As Pijpers (2022) argues, states across the

¹ The green transition is a shorthand for all the processes involved in the global transformation that will end the dependency of fossil fuels.

globe have historically associated extractive industries and particularly mining with ‘development’ especially when understood as economic growth but also in the production of infrastructure, employment opportunities, and a boost of the service sector. Therefore, within mainstream political discourse mineral extraction has been seen as a stepping-stone for development, associated with expectations of modernity and a good life. For proponents of mining, this has often been the key argument for how a mine can benefit more than the mining company, whose main interests lie in the accumulation of capital through the extraction of resources. In a Swedish context, the green transition and the promise of development is also accompanied by arguments of taking responsibility for the future in relation to climate change (see paper I and II). These arguments can be divided into two strands of thought. The first is that the extraction of so-called green minerals is a way to take responsibility for the climate crisis, since the minerals will be used to produce technology thought to be necessary for a fossil-free society. The second strand of thought is that those who use minerals should also take responsibility for their extraction. The latter argument is associated with imagery of child labour or inadequate environmental protection in mines located in the Global South (paper I, II and IV).

In one sense the green transition narrative brings something new to the rural North, as interests in land and the utilisation of mineral resources intensify. Yet, as historian Sverker Sörlin (1988; 2019; 2023) has shown, this process is remarkably similar to how Northern Sweden was described as a resource-abundant ‘land of the future’ since the turn of the 19th century. Even further back, in the 17th century, the Swedish Crown regarded the North and its resources as a land where the state could realise its colonial aspirations and accumulate the wealth that other European powers extracted overseas, a fact that has been picked up in indigenous studies on mining and colonialism (Lindmark 2013; Åhren & Lawrence 2017; Ojala & Nordin 2019). This had dramatic implications not least for the indigenous Sami people, whose lands to this day contain the majority of the Swedish mines, as well as potential new mining sites. Then, as now, ‘development’ in the rural North and by extension the Swedish nation, has been closely tied to resource extraction infused with grand visions of the future that both involve and extend beyond the local context where extraction takes place. For the people living at the sites of extraction, the green transition’s demand for minerals therefore represents a continuation of a history formed by resource extraction, as well

as a potential for rapid and turbulent change. In the next section I lay out how the history of land use, extraction, and rights has shaped the rural North in ways that are still important for today's context.

3.1 A History of Land Use and Rights in the North

The history of the Swedish North is a history of resource extraction where mining and minerals hold an essential role. The colonisation of Northern Sweden, and with that the Swedish push into Sápmi², the traditional homeland of the indigenous Sami peoples, began in earnest in the 17th century after the discovery of silver in Nasafjäll (Ojala & Nordin 2015; Ojala & Nordin 2019). Mining in particular became a driving force behind the colonisation of indigenous territories (Ojala & Nordin 2015; Ojala & Nordin 2019). The relationship entailed extraction from the North to the benefit of urban centres in the South (Sörlin 2019) was achieved through a process which has been referred to as 'internal colonization' by historian Daniel Lindmark (2013) Drawing on (Tully 2000) and his work on internal colonisation in North America, Lindmark argues that this was a process through which territories that existed within the national borders were slowly incorporated through the development of the forest industry, the northern expansion of industrial infrastructure, together with an increasing non-recognition of indigenous rights (e.g., property rights) (for examples see Össbo 2014; Ojala & Nordin 2015; Brännström 2017; Åhren & Lawrence 2017). This is a structure of suppression that persists to this day as for example reindeer grazing lands that are central to the Sami traditional livelihood of reindeer herding is under increasing pressure from a range of extractive industries (Raitio et al. 2020; Österlin & Raitio 2020).

Beginning in the middle of the 18th century and on to the first decades of the 20th century, the increased pressure on the natural resources of the Swedish North caused a transformation of Sami property rights and livelihoods. According to Lennart Lundmark (2006), who has written extensively about Sami-Swedish history, it is in this period that the extensive form of reindeer herding, with large herds that migrate from the coast to the mountains of the inland, became dominant. Prior to this, different systems of

² The Swedish part of Sápmi includes almost one third of the nation's landmass and contain the Sami reindeer pastures. Sápmi also includes territories in Norway, Finland and the Kola peninsula.

herding coexisted, with some Sami having smaller herds which did not migrate to the same extent. However, the Swedish state regarded the extensive system as a better way to utilise the land (Lundmark 2006). This policy saw the birth of legislation in the form of the first three reindeer herding Acts (passed in 1886, 1898, and 1928). Apart from entrenching the extensive herding system, these laws and their associated policies led to the Sami people increasingly becoming regarded as reindeer herding nomads (Lantto 2012). While the industrialisation of Norrland led to conflicts between the Sami, settlers, and the growing industries, it is also true that many of those who became settlers were Sami, in part because they were forced out of reindeer herding by state interventions, but also as a way to claim rights to their traditional homeland (Lantto 2014).

Sami rights to land are today mainly enforced through the Reindeer Farming Act (RFA) of 1971, a law that gave shape to the Reindeer Herding Associations (RHA) that are both an economic association of reindeer herders and denote the reindeer pastures that a RHA governs (Enoksson & Sunesson 2020). Only about 10% of the Sami population are members of RHAs. Therefore most Sami cannot invoke the RFA to make claims to land, sometimes creating a dividing line between reindeer herding and non-reindeer herding Sami (Lantto & Mörkenstam 2008).

Malin Brännström (2017) describes how the main thrust of the colonialisation of the Northern inland took off towards the latter half of 18th century. Settlers (both Swedish and Sami) were granted property rights and were exempt from taxation and military service so long as they made new land available for agriculture. Minerals, charcoal (which was needed in the ironworks further south), tar, and farmland acquired through slash-and-burn agriculture represented this first major push inland. Like the rest of the Northern counties, the forests in Västerbotten, the county where Storuman is located, were, before the processes of settling began, considered Crown lands. In an effort to support the new farmers, the Crown began a process of turning Crown lands into private land.

By the end of the 19th century forest land became highly sought after, as large sawmill companies began to dominate the industrial sector in the North. As the forest-based industries grew, the pressure on privately owned forest land increased, and the companies used all means necessary to gain control of the forest, paying large amounts for the land as well as using threats and fraudulent methods to acquire it (Brännström 2017). As the forest owners

sold off their property, the national government became concerned that large tracts of land ended up in the hands of a few large companies. This became known as *Norrlandsfrågan* ('the Norrland question') which led to the government dividing up and collectivising forest land. This was done in part to protect the small-scale farmers and foresters, but it was also a way to subject the land to taxation and keep it out of the hands of the forest companies. In Västerbotten, the process of dividing up the forest lands ended in the 1920s and by then the land had been divided into private lands, state owned lands, and forest commons (ibid). As a result of this it became unclear who could exercise rights on the divided land, which still leads to conflict among land users. The most common of these disputes are, according to Brännström (2017), related to hunting and fishing rights that are connected to private property.

Mining and the search for minerals, especially silver and then later copper and iron, was a key factor that made the Swedish Crown pursue a politics of colonisation of the Northern counties. One of the goals of encouraging settlement was to provide the infrastructure needed to transport ore from the inland to the coast. In 1890, the export of iron ore from the North became increasingly important for the Swedish economy (Nyström 2002). The industrialised forestry and mining sector increased the flow of people to the Northern counties and small towns began to pop up, as workers connected to the industries moved to the new towns (ibid. p. 88).

Many of the towns in the municipalities that make up Västerbotten County were founded around the turn of the last century as a result of this. In 1924, what was to become the largest privately owned mining company in Sweden, Boliden AB, found gold near the town of Skellefteå in Västerbotten. Today, the company owns six active mines in Västerbotten. The success of Boliden is important for the people in Västerbotten in so far as people now regard mining as a possible way to secure the development of the regional economy.

The history of natural resource extraction and the industrialisation of Norrland is also a history of hydro power, as Åsa Össbo (2014) has shown in her thesis on the industrial colonisation of the reindeer grazing lands. Össbo shows how in relation to the expansion of hydro power on Sami lands, indigenous rights were downplayed and ignored as land and rivers were sacrificed for the 'common good' of modernity and industrialisation. The transformation of the large river systems into energy suppliers began in the

early 20th century and lasted until the 1970s. Like the other two large extractive industries, forestry and mining, the electrification of the rivers in the North was regarded as matters of national interest, but also as a way to supply the growing costal industries with electric power (Össbo 2014).

According to local historians, the construction of the dams saw an increase in population to towns, such as Storuman, as the development and maintenance of the power plants created a high demand for labour (Edlund 1989). The power plants also flooded river valleys, which led to forced relocations of settled farms and barred the migration paths for the reindeer herders. From the 1950s onward, the electrification of Umeå River, which runs through Västerbotten and whose largest lake is Storuman,³ met resistance on both a local and national scale, as villagers and environmental activists came together in order to protect both property and the environment (ibid.). Regardless of the protests however, Umeå River is now almost completely harnessed for hydro power.

3.2 An Introduction to Swedish Mining Politics

In an interview in November 2021 the then newly appointed Swedish Minister of Enterprise and former Chairman of the Swedish Trade Union Confederation was asked about the government's stance on mining in Sweden. The Minister answered: 'It is not that we take environmental issues lightly, but yes, we in the Social Democratic Party love mines!' (Ugglå & Nilsson 2021). With this statement, the Minister reaffirmed a political position wherein mining holds a central and obvious place in the economic development of the country.

Mining's long-held contribution to the Swedish economy (through exports, employment, and industrial production of metals) is often held up as evidence that opening new mines will continue this process of development into the future (Haikola & Anshelm 2016). In policy documents such as the Swedish Mineral Strategy (Regeringskansliet 2013) and by the mining industry itself, mines are portrayed as important for providing employment and regional economic growth, especially in rural areas facing economic decline. Mining is framed as furthering, rather than posing a challenge to, the goal of an environmentally sustainable future (Hildesten *et al.* 2022).

³ The municipality took its name from the lake when the municipality was established in 1971.

The image of the mine as a driving force of regional economies has a long history in Sweden, and it is not without an element of truth. In mineral abundant regions such as Bergslagen, Kiruna-Malmberget, and the Skellefteå Field,⁴ whole towns and infrastructural networks have been geared towards the extraction and refinement of minerals. However, even though mining seems to occupy a prominent place within the Swedish economic imaginary, the increase in exploration and extraction of minerals that has taken place in the last decade stands out and has been traced to shifts in legislation, policy, and market demand. According to Haikola and Anshelm (2018), who studied recent developments in national mining politics, the increase in activity is the result of a general increase in mineral prices, and the liberalisation of national mining politics that began in the early 1990s (see also Envall 2018). This political shift began with liberalising market reforms which culminated in Sweden with the adoption of the 1991 mineral Act, which saw the removal of the 50 % tax on profits made within a company (replacing it with a 0.05% fee on production output) as well as the opening up of the national market for foreign mining companies.

The move to liberalise the mining sector was made in the hope that it would secure the supply of minerals to domestic and international markets as well as to ensure that mineral extraction continues to be an important national economic focus. The shift had the desired effect: subsequent changes in policy led to the Canadian-based neoliberal think-tank, The Fraser Institute⁵ deeming Sweden the 3rd most attractive country in terms of policy for mining investments in Europe in 2021 (Yunis & Aliakbari 2022). The government's position⁶ on the role of the mining industry is clearly expressed in the Mineral Strategy from 2013 (Regeringskansliet 2013). The mining industry is described as important for both regional and national growth and development, and the opening of modern, sustainable mines in Sweden is presented as a continuation of a history where mines are the backbone of rural communities.

Today, there is renewed interest in mining and minerals in the political debate (see paper II). Stemming from the desire to extract minerals for the

⁴ The Skellefteå Field is a large area of copper and gold mines that stretches from the municipality of Skellefteå and ends at the outskirts of Storuman municipality.

⁵ The Fraser Institute (FI) makes a yearly assessment of jurisdictions (nations and federal states) in relation to how attractive they are for mining investments. FI describes itself as a neoliberal, working to deregulate markets and to guide investors. The institute's rankings are often used as a benchmark in Swedish media that covers mining.

⁶ This position seems to hold true regardless of the ideological orientation of the ruling political parties.

green transition, and particularly for environmentally sustainable technology, mining has become a hot topic for news editorials and government surveys (Hallberg & Reginiussen 2018; From *et al.* 2019; Höök 2023). Conflicting positions on mining have previously been framed in terms of employment opportunities vs the environment or indigenous rights. However, in contemporary mining politics, mining, development, and land rights are discussed in relation to the green transition (see for example Busch *et al.* 2023; Haupt 2023).

When I attended the opening of an OECD conference on mining policy, organised in Skellefteå in June 2019, the CEO of the largest private Swedish mining company, Boliden, talked at length about the possibilities of green technology. In his speech, he touched on a theme that ran throughout the conference, namely that with the green transition comes a new mining boom.

The coming of a ‘green mining’ boom has entered the longstanding debates that shape life in the regions targeted for exploration. Questions regarding the indigenous territorial rights of the Sami people, the threat of environmental disaster, and if and how the mines could co-exist with or would usurp current forms of land use, are central to debates that surround the mining projects (see paper I–IV). The current intense activity in mining and prospecting can be seen as an expression of contemporary extractive politics, but it is also a sequence in a history of large scale resource extraction in Northern Sweden, on par with industrial forestry and the development of hydro power plants in the past (SGS n.d.).

3.3 Mining Application Processes and Mining Regulations

In this section I offer an overview of the processes involved in making a mine. In 2016 the Swedish Geological Survey (SGS) created a guide that describes the processes of making a mine (SGS 2016). The applicant must first be able to show that they are capable (i.e. have enough knowledge and capital) of carrying out the extraction of minerals. The application process is rather detailed, and it contains several steps in which different stakeholders as well as governmental agencies participate. In the mining projects in Storuman, stakeholders are either property owners or reindeer herding communities, and the governmental agencies include the Mining Inspectorate (MI), the Environmental Administrative Courts (EAC), the County

Administration Board (CAB) and, to a lesser extent, the municipality. At different stages of the process, it is possible for stakeholders and non-governmental organisations to appeal to have the permits retracted, and the same goes for the mining company, who can have their denied application tested by the national government and then the Supreme Administrative Court.

The government agencies included quite often stand in opposition to one another. An example of this would be the MI and the Sami Parliament, where the latter generally seek to safeguard Sami land rights while MI seeks to further the interests of industry. However, the agencies are not given equal weight. MI has the right of decision, whereas the Sami Parliament first and foremost informs the permitting process about distribution of reindeer grazing lands.

All the mining projects in Storuman exist as concession permits, which is the stage that follows prospecting for minerals. The permit ensures the holder exclusive usufruct to the minerals within the area designated for extraction, and the property owner decides if they want to be compensated for the intrusion or if they want to turn over the property rights to the state (SGS 2018). The concession permit lasts for 25 years and can be sold to another mining company provided it is deemed capable in the same way as the company which first applied for the permit. A concession should only be given to allow the extraction of concession minerals, minerals that are of significant economic value to the Swedish nation, as stipulated in the Mineral Act (1991:45). If a concession permit passes through the EIA, the holder can apply for designation of the land needed for starting the mine and then begin extraction. During the extraction phase, the mining company is obliged to pay an annual royalty to the landowner and the state at the start of every year. The amount is based on 0.2% of the expected profits from the current year, of which three fourths belong to the property owner and one fourth goes to the Swedish state. Table 1 outlines the permitting process involved in the making of a mine.

Table 1. Mining permitting process

Permitting process	
<p>The permitting process involves the following state agencies:</p> <p>Mining Inspectorate (MI): The MI is the central agency for the administration and control of mining activities in Sweden. It offers support to mining companies and holds a substantial role throughout the permitting process. The MI is headed by the Mining Inspector. MI sorts under the Swedish Geological Survey, who oversees Sweden's water and mineral resources.</p> <p>County Administrative Board (CAB): The CABs represent the Swedish State on a county level. While being agencies in their own right, they cooperate closely with national agencies (e.g. the Board of Agriculture) and execute policies on their behalf.</p> <p>Environmental Administrative Courts (EAC): Courts that make rulings based on environmental and societal planning legislation.</p> <p>Environmental Impact Assessment: EIA</p>	
Step	Involved Agency
Exploration permit: This grants the exploration/mining company exclusive right to explore a specific area.	MI
Possibility to apply for exploratory extraction permits or demands for special permits concerning Nature 2000 reserves.	CAB and/or EAC
Concession permit: Grants the mining or exploration company the exclusive right to extract minerals from a deposit. The company needs to prove that the deposit is economically viable for extraction and should include an EIA. The application for a permit is sent for referral to the CAB who also contact the affected municipality or municipalities. Should the MI and the CAB reach different conclusions, or other stakeholders make a successful appeal, the decision on the permit is moved to the national Government.	MI
Environmental permit: Mining is by default considered an environmentally hazardous activity and it must therefore be shown that measures have been taken to mitigate the impact on the surrounding environment and communities. The mining company must provide an EIA, which must include a consultation with affected stakeholders and relevant government agencies (e.g., CAB). In most cases this include the municipality	EAC (can also include municipalities)
Land allocation: The company applies to have land allocated for the purpose of extraction. This gives the company not only right to extract the mineral but also to use the land above ground to erect the needed infrastructure. May include the municipality as a stakeholder.	MI
Construction permit: The company applies for a permit that allows them to erect the buildings and facilities needed to begin extraction.	Municipality

Throughout the processes it might be necessary to include other agencies (e.g., the Environment Protection Agency or the Ministry of Defence)

3.4 Storuman, Mining Projects, and Abandoned Mines

In this section I provide an overview of the three active mining projects and the two abandoned mines in Storuman municipality. I begin with a short overview of Storuman municipality.

Storuman municipality lies in the northern inland of Sweden (see figure 1), and can be divided into a western and eastern part. In the east lies the administrative centre, the town of Storuman, and the villages Barsele, Stensele, and Gunnarn. The landscape is dominated by large pine and spruce forests, lakes, and mountain ridges. Storuman is the largest settlement in the municipality, followed by nearby Stensele and then Tärnaby which lies in the western part of the municipality. Tärnaby, and the adjacent village of Hemavan, are located within the alpine mountains near the Norwegian border. The area is an important site for the local Sami culture and has in recent decades also seen an increased pressure from tourism. The municipality is also intersected by two Sami reindeer herding associations, Vapsten and Ubmeje tjeälddie. Vapsten RHA has been surrounded by much controversy, as there is a long and still ongoing conflict between two different Sami groups concerning who should have the right to the reindeer grazing lands. The conflict has its roots in the forced relocation of northern Sami groups into southern Sami lands, where members of the northern group came into possession of the grazing rights that the southern group, native to Tärna, saw as theirs. Ultimately, state interventions in the conflict have led to several legal processes, and deeply entrenched positions divide the two groups (Lantto 2014).

Between the two population centres, Storuman municipality is sparsely populated (0.8 inhabitants per sq.km.) with roughly 5900 inhabitants, 57% of whom live in the towns, with the majority living in Storuman. A third of the population is between the ages of 25 and 54, and almost one third is above 65. The rate of employment is higher than the national average according to Statistics Sweden (SCB 2021).

In Storuman, large scale primary production enterprises are particularly evident in the extensive tracts of production forests, eight hydroelectric power plants, and more recently a large wind power park. The presence of these large-scale activities has shaped both the landscape and social relations of Storuman, as is evident from a local history of the place (Edlund 1989).

Especially the damming of the river system that runs through the valleys of the municipality has left its traces on the land and the people of area: it led to a great loss of land and properties, and still shapes how people view large industrial actors, as seen in my interviews. For some, the power plants have meant employment, but for others, their presence has come with a devastating loss as related to us by people living along the riverbeds. In the western outskirts of the municipality, the regulation of the waters resulted in the flooding of the valley Björkvattsdalen, and many of the inhabitants, a majority of whom were Sami, had to relocate.

Actual mining activities in Storuman are comparatively recent and few in relation to the more heavily mined region to the east. The first operational mine within the municipality was a gold mine that started in 2005. The goldmine is now depleted, but according to the Australian owner, Dragon Mining (2015), the company is now exploring adjacent sites for further extraction. Two other attempts to start extraction can be found in the now abandoned mines in Blaiken (which partly is located in the neighbouring municipality Sorsele) and Svärträsk.

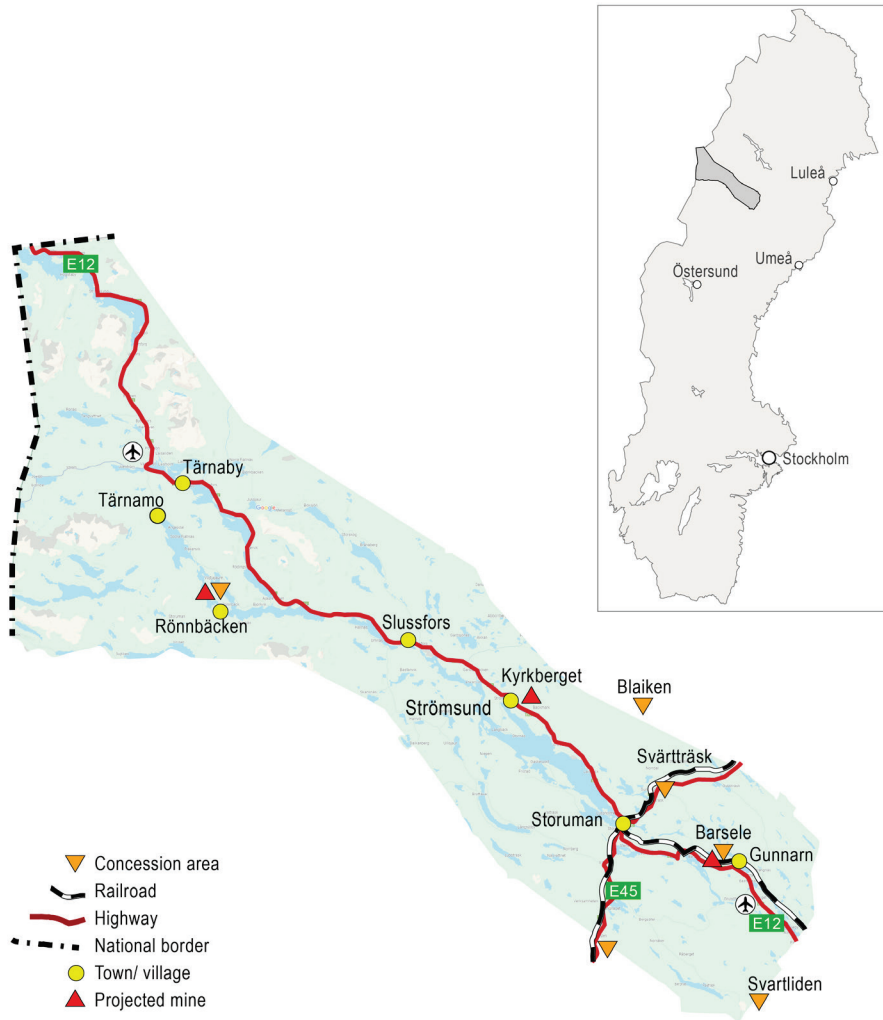


Figure 1. Map of Storuman Municipality

3.4.1 Blaiken and Svärträsk

In 2006 the mineral exploration company Scanmining began extracting zinc in Blaiken, and the expectations that this would lead to new jobs and new people moving to Storuman and Sorsele municipality were high (Müller 2014). However, as journalist Arne Müller (*ibid.*) writes in his book about the Swedish mining industry, the quality of the deposit was poor, something

that the Swedish Environmental Agency had remarked on during the application process. The company was off to a rocky start, and in a bid to secure more ore for the mineral processing, the company expanded operations to the adjacent deposit in Svärträsk. The project was not to last, and in December 2007 Scanmining filed for bankruptcy (SVT 2007). The project was then bought by the company Lappland Goldminers in 2008, who continued exploration and attempted to get the sites operational. The new company ultimately failed and went bankrupt in 2012.

Since the start both Blaiken and Svärträsk have been troubled by environmental problems, where the most troublesome is that the mines have leaked toxic waste into the adjacent river and lake.

3.4.2 Kyrkberget

Owned by the English company Tertiary Minerals, this project holds a concession permit for a fluorspar mine, a mineral used in the production of aluminium. The company seek to develop an open pit mine, close to the villages Strömsund, Högländ, Blaiken, and Ersmark. The company was first given the right to proceed in the permitting process, but in 2016 Ubmeje tjeälddie RHA and the environmental non-governmental organisation Urbergsgruppen made an appeal to the government (SVT 2016) who changed the decision and asked Tertiary Minerals to re-apply with an improved application. In early 2019, after the second round of application, the Mining Inspectorate denied the company their concession permit and explained that the operations would cause damages to reindeer pastures (TT 2019). In response, Tertiary Minerals has appealed to the Supreme Administrative Court to have the decision changed. In September 2023 the Swedish government decided to send the issue back to the Mining Inspectorate, to have their decision reevaluated, expecting the agency to take the national interest in minerals into stronger consideration (SVT 2023a). Government representatives have argued that this could set a precedent for a more mining-friendly administration in Sweden.

3.4.3 Rönnbäcken

Rönnbäcken is the site of a much-contested mining project of nickel extraction. After exploration began in 2008, plans for what could be the largest mine in Västerbotten began (SVT 2009). A concession permit was granted in 2012, and is held by the Swedish company Nickel Mountain. The

project came to a standstill in 2016, but the company issued a press release in December 2018, stating that an increasing nickel price still makes the site interesting. Rönnbäcken is located in Björkvattdalen, which is a valley with several small settlements. Many of the inhabitants are Sami. From the start of prospecting in 2008 the proposed mine was met with local resistance, which soon formed into a network called Stoppa Gruvan i Rönnbäcken (Persson 2015).

There are several motivations for this local resistance against the mine: a wish to be part of a wider resistance against the colonisation of traditional Sami lands; a history of mistrust of large-scale industrial interventions; and concern for the environmental impact of the mine, as the bedrock contains arsenic and is located close to a large river system (Persson & Öhman 2014). The mine is also contested by Vapsten RHA. The conflict has involved a wide range of actors, and apart from the local groups described above, they include Storuman municipality, the national government, the mining inspectorate, the Sami Parliament, and The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

In 2021 the company Bluelake minerals took over the project in 2021 and have since begun a process of exploring the economic feasibility of the project. Since the new company took over, the green transition has become more prominent among the proponents of mining, and the need for ‘green’ minerals is used as a central argument in favour of the project (SVT 2023b). This, the opponents of the project argues, is nothing more than an attempt to green-wash the project and is an example of ‘green colonialism’ (SVT 2021).

3.4.4 Skirträsket and the Gunnarn-Barsele Area

Southeast of Storuman lies a large area that is currently prospected by the Canadian mining company Agnico Eagle (AE) who specialise in gold mining. The mineral exploration began in 2016 when AE acquired the permits (SVT 2016a). However, the area has been home to several exploration projects since the 1980s, then carried out by other companies. At present AE holds a concession permit for an open pit gold and copper mine located close to Skirträsket, a lake that lies just north of the small village of Barsele. The mining company is also conducting mineral exploration on the lands just west of Gunnarn, a village east of Barsele. Compared to the other two mining companies AE is an established mining company which has several active mines in Canada, Mexico, and Finland. The company has set

up a local branch office in Storuman and has stated that good relations to local government and the local population is key for their operations. Compared to the other two active projects there has been little open resistance, although villagers in Barsele are worried about what will happen if the mine becomes a reality (SVT 2016b).

4. Conceptual Framework

In order to study how extractive industrial development transform rural areas in different ways this thesis brings together literature on territory, rural governance, and development. I lead with an introduction to the concept of ‘open moments’, the extended moment of uncertainty that defines my experience in Storuman. I then move on to conceptualisations of development and review literature that poses questions of what development is. I build on this to discuss how different notions that are associated with development shape experiences of life in rural areas in Sweden, where ideas of sacrifice and feelings of being ‘left behind’ are central. Following this I relate the idea of development to resource extraction and briefly discuss how development relates to research on mining in Sweden. I conclude with the section ‘Territory, Land, and Property’, where I discuss how the twin concepts of territory and territorialisation help me understand how access and the governance of land is transformed by the coming of the mining projects. As an overarching theme in the sections I discuss research on indigeneity and indigenous rights, thereby showing how insights from this research are key to understand what is happening in northern rural Sweden today.

4.1 Ruptures, Events, and Open Moments

Lund (2016:102) uses the term ‘open moment’ to describe ‘ruptures’, and defines the open moment as a turbulent period in time when the scaffolding of a previous order is destroyed as risks and opportunities for change multiply. Building on his work on the relation between state authority and property rights in Ghana and Indonesia, Lund describes the encounter with colonialism as a typical example of a rupture, as established property regimes are violently dismantled and replaced. Consolidating work that has conceptualised

‘rupture’, predominantly in the Global South, Mahanty *et al.* (2023) adapt and theorise rupture as a disturbance, particularly in nature-society relations that lead to crisis, such as the building of a dam which dispossess and displace people in areas affected by the new structure. They argue that a rupture must be understood in relation to its historical and material context, meaning that ruptures are shaped both by the environment and people’s previous relations to that environment. Emphasising the temporality of ruptures, they state that ruptures are defined by an interplay of ‘slow violence’ (ibid: 185) and punctuated changes of rapid devastation. Slow violence is, according to Nixon (2011), a form of accumulative violence that does harm over time, rather than in explosive bursts, e.g. practices that cause environmental degradation which in turn cause harm to a population. This association between rupture and slow violence suggests that ruptures are always damaging. In the following, I will propose a contrasting view of ‘open moments’ which can account for constructive potentialities too.

In his work on the relationship between societal structures and transformative events, Sahlins (1985) argues that an event does not signal a clean break with the current established social order but rather is contingent on the order in which it unfolds. Sahlins writes: ‘An event is not just a happening in the world, it is a relation between a certain happening and a given symbolic system’ (Sahlins 1985:153). Similarly, working in the context of post-colonial India, Das Das (1995) uses the term ‘critical events’ to describe moments in time in which new actions come into being that disrupt established orders.

Building on Sahlins’ work, Sewell (2005) argues that there is an interplay between structure and event where the event is dependent on the structures, but structure is also (re)shaped and (re)defined by events (Sewell, 2005: 200). Sahlins and Sewell discuss events on a macro or societal level (e.g., the French Revolution) but, as Moore (2011) argues drawing on his work on local ethnic conflicts in post-war Bosnia, events shape the social reproduction of society and occur on the micro, meso, and macro level, and at smaller timescales.

I use open moment to describe a more ‘soft opening’, as opposed to the violent rupture. There are overlaps between the elements of that which constitutes a rupture and how I conceptualise an open moment, namely the increase of opportunity/risks for rapid change and the importance of historical and material context. As we show in paper I, the ‘softness’ of an open moment lies in the *potentiality* for rapid change of established structures.

By identifying what is at stake within the open moment, it can be employed as a heuristic device, similarly to what Moore (1987:730) refers to as a ‘diagnostic event’, a moment in time where both established structures and potential change is brought to the surface. In matters of environmental governance and industrial development, this means that questions and struggles about rights and access to land become heightened for the actors who are connected through the open moment. As I will go on to show, the open moment is useful since it can show how certain topics become politicised, debated, and are up for claims, which has implications for development.

4.2 Conceptualising Development

Development as a political term entered the mainstream political discourse during the post-World War II era of reconstruction and independence from colonial rule. US and Western European foreign policy divided the world into ‘developed’ and ‘underdeveloped’ countries, where the latter should be assisted in their development by the former (Lewis 2012; Esteva 2019). The ‘underdeveloped’ states were predominantly located in what since the 1980s has been referred to as the Third World and later the Global South, most of which were in or about to enter a post-colonial reality (Lewis 2012). The paternalistic idea of development where the ‘developed’ would guide the ‘underdeveloped’ was strongly associated with ideas of modernity, where western economies were set as the hallmark for the rest of the world to emulate. From the 1980s the Washington Consensus emphasis on growth was expanded upon, and ‘being developed’ became associated with a regard for human rights and an increase in life expectancy, level of education, and sustainable use of environmental resources (ibid.).

Cowen and Shenton (1996) show that development thinking has deeper roots than the 1950s, stretching back to state practices in the early nineteenth century. They place emphasis on the idea of trusteeship and how representatives of certain states that saw themselves as ‘developed’ also took it upon themselves to guide the ‘underdeveloped’ along the path towards development. According to this view, development is an interventionist practice, where the enlightened and developed have the right and almost the duty to intervene to develop, showing the colonial roots of development thinking. Furthermore, they point out that development is often described as an imminent process, the goal of which unfolds as time progresses, e.g., the

modern sustainable future will be realised through capitalist development of green technology just like present economic and social standards arose from the industrial revolution.

These two aspects, of development, where the first indicates progress over time and the other fortifies normative categories, fill places with meanings that define them in certain ways and engender practices that introduce new actors, flows of resources, and ideas into the targeted place. Government policies that identify areas as strategic for mining development also make claims that define these places, as for example Vela-Almeida (2018) has shown in the creation of mining territories in the Andes.

While the grand schemes that structured relationships between the Global North and South from the 1950s onwards do not lend themselves completely to the context of a municipality in the rural parts of northern Sweden, I see a relation between development thinking, resource extraction, and modernity. The divide between the developed/underdeveloped is here instead a divide between the urban and the rural, as researchers in rural development point out. For example Forsberg (1996:36), writes about the relationship between urban and rural, where the urban is taken as the norm and a place to be modern, and the rural becomes abnormal, a thing apart and left behind. Sörlin (2019; 2023) shows that the construction of the rural north of Sweden as ‘the land of the future’ enables it to assume a role within the nation state: if only developed properly, the resource-rich area could enrich the whole nation state. Here there is a connection to natural resource extraction, such as mining. However, while mining is undeniably a transformative force in rural areas, the relationship between mining and rurality is not well conceptualised, especially within the context of Europe and the Global North (del Marmol & Vaccaro 2020; Cirefice *et al.* 2023)

Development has been and continues to be a key goal for government policy making and the subject of much academic scholarship. Yet the political term is ambiguous and is often framed in different ways and is, as scholars are prone to pointing out, hard to define (Cowen & Shenton 1996). However, what all definitions seem to agree on is that development denotes some kind of often positive change, pointing towards a future where things are different and better from what they are now. It can be observed from different positions, in top-down state programs or in village associations taking measures to ensure a better future for the local community.

Development, especially when connected to resource extraction, can also mean turbulent, rapid, and irrevocable change (Bebbington & Humphreys Bebbington 2018) with vast wealth creation, at least for some, but also dramatic changes to landscape and social relations. Herein lies a connection between development and open moments.

In an attempt to capture the diversity of the development concept, but writing from a post-development perspective, Lewis (2012) presents a framework where he divides the different meanings of development into three different themes. First, he suggests that development infers activities required to bring about change or progress which is often equated with economic growth. Second, he argues that it can be understood as a standard against which different rates of progress may be compared, thereby taking on a subjective, judgmental element. Lastly, development can be said to be planned social change. In the context of this thesis, this can be observed in certain frameworks such as the European Green Deal initiative or in the strategy of neo-industrialisation of the Swedish north. Although the themes place emphasis on different aspects of what development is, Lewis argues that they overlap and draw on each other. The subjective and normative aspect of development that Lewis argues for, suggest that we should ask by which standard development is measured or otherwise evaluated. This has been the task for post-development scholars (see for example Ziai 2007; Escobar 2011; Sachs 2019), as they have pointed out that development discourses are filled with uneven relations of power.

Foucault (1980) argues power should not be understood as something that can be possessed, but is manifested through social relations and actions. As a great deal of feminist and critical research has shown, social relations are structured along intersecting relations of power, shaping peoples' identities along lines of gender, race, class, ethnicity and so on (Collins & Bilge 2020). These categories are not mutually exclusive but contingent on each other and manifested in peoples everyday lives (ibid.) According to Foucault's theory of power relations, power is most subtle when it is self-disciplining, i.e., when we act in certain ways because we know this to be the only and right way to act (Lynch 2011). Within a development discourse where the peripheral rural areas are constructed as 'falling behind' or 'suffering from a lack development', acting to alleviate this suffering become 'the right way to act'. People who are in a position where they are seen as 'development experts' and can define both what development entail and how this can be achieved hold

positions of power. Relations of power, according to this line of thought, can be both oppressive or structuring and productive (Taylor 2011). Yet, while development discourses can be constraining, people are not merely passive recipients. They can actively also change them from within, as they take over mainstream discourses, twist and redefine them to suit their needs and conditions (Arora-Jonsson 2013:215; Jenkins 2024).

4.2.1 Shaping Rural Sweden through Development

So far, I have mainly framed development as a mindset and a set of practices that an external actor brings to a place. Li (2017) argues that alternative pathways of development open up in protests and in the everyday lives of people, as they challenge what they see as problematic in the world and asks how things could be made different. This shows how potential development trajectories can emerge from the ground within open moments. Showing how development as imagined by local communities themselves are understood as activities that seek to improve conditions within a given place, Arora-Jonsson (2013) reveals that important insights and alternative pathways of development can be found in the everyday actions of people living in rural areas. Development here encompasses dreams and visions of democracy and a ‘living countryside.’ This turns my focus to ‘the rural’ and how it is constructed.

In mainstream imaginations of the rural, urban areas, equated with economic growth and development were seen as the antithesis of the underdeveloped *glesbygd*, (sparsely populated rural areas in Sweden) with rural inhabitants depicted as those who have been ‘left behind’ and with few future prospects (Arora-Jonsson 2013:73) Contrasting this idea of the *glesbygd* as a backwater, but keeping the urban perspective, rural areas are also constructed as an idyllic countryside, a place for recreation in pristine environments and unchanging original culture (Shucksmith 2018). In relation to the rural UK McAreevey (2023) shows how a cover-all notion of what the rural is gets in the way of our understanding of the actual places, as it hides the nuances of local and regional contexts. Here I see a close connection with what has been argued in indigenous research on mining (Åhren & Lawrence 2017), where rural Sápmi, which encompasses large parts of northern Sweden, is constructed as an empty vastness. In what follows, I seek to show how rural areas shaped through ideas of development.

In rural Sweden, rural areas have sometimes been constructed as being in a constant struggle with the urban which is taken to be the norm of society (Forsberg 1996; Svensson 2017; Sjöstedt 2021). Shifts in national policy in the 1990's promoted a policy that fostered competition between regions in Sweden creating a form of uneven development between various regions (Westholm 2009). On this uneven playing field, rural municipalities had to deal with the consequences of politics that have favoured urban centres in Sweden for most of the 20th century (Arora-Jonsson 2013:55–59). This continues to shape the relationship between local governance and rural development.

Research on local governments in rural Sweden show that political intervention against issues such as declining populations or high costs of welfare services, are often made to address an immediate problem rather than finding a long-term solution (Syssner 2014; Keskitalo *et al.* 2019). In her work on shrinking and struggling municipalities, Syssner (2014) show that when these problems become associated with a specific solution (e.g., stimulate local businesses), local governments tend to disregard or downplay alternative ways of understanding and dealing with the problem, creating a set of 'perceptions of what is possible to do'. I go on to argue how this form of 'lock down' of solutions shape development in relation to the mining projects (see also paper II).

In other work on rural governance in Sweden, development is thought in terms of citizen participation, where civil society steps in to take responsibility for government functions, often with the support of regional governments (Arora-Jonsson 2017). However, as Arora-Jonsson argues, while this can make local governance more inclusive of people's wants and needs, it can also lead to a shift in responsibility from governments to citizens, without any substantial changes to resource flows, reinforcing uneven relationships. Cras (2017) shows that people in rural areas organise themselves to maintain functions and services that in urban areas are provided by government or through businesses. Cras points out how this 'development from below' strengthens relationships among people in rural areas, while at the same time distances them from the central government.

In an overview of rural research on Europe, Arora-Jonsson and McAreavey show how the rural is a discursive construct, a set of political relations, as well as material places. They argue that a sense of crisis has tended to overshadow material and environmental approaches in rural studies

obscuring the plurality of lives in rural places that research needs to address to work meaningfully with transitions and sustainability. (Arora-Jonsson & McAreavey 2023).

Rural spaces are shaped by relationships between people and nature, which I go on to show, are central for how people frame development and position themselves regarding the mining projects. For example, writing about their experiences of living in a village in northern Sweden, Bergelin *et al.* (2008) show how a bond between people living in a rural village and their relation to their lived-in nature is central to the way they mobilise for local development.

The relationship between the rural, development and environment is particularly clear within indigenous research, where alternative ways of framing both development and environment from a rurally situated perspective are abundant. As I show in paper III these alternative framings are manifested in ways of being with the landscape (see also Ween & Lien 2017; Joks *et al.* 2020), how the development is framed as taking responsibility for places (Paper I), and how the development of infrastructure impinges on indigenous livelihoods which are dependent on rural land (Österlin & Raitio 2020).

The ideas of an empty vastness and a struggling *glesbygd* are, as I show in paper II, connected to notions of 'sacrifice'. Klein (2015: 148) writes that development driven by resource extraction can lead to the creation of so called 'sacrifice zones', places whose existence do not count beyond that as a supplier of raw materials. These sites of extraction, predominantly found in the Global South, are disregarded, or become severely disrupted, polluted, and made unliveable for local people to the benefit of economic progress elsewhere. Skorstad *et al.* (2018), writing about resource extraction in the Arctic, show that 'sacrifice zones' are the spaces which are destructively transformed through the processes involved in resource extraction. In the most extreme cases, sacrifice zones denote places which, in the pursuit of valuable resources, have been left scarred, polluted, and barren for the long term (Lerner 2012). Klein (2015) argues that a sacrifice zone is an area that 'does not count' and as such both places and people can be destroyed for the sake of economic progress. del Mármol and Vaccaro (2020) have shown that in Europe, rural areas, constructed as peripheries to urban centres, are more likely to become sacrificed in the pursuit of the greater good, be it the green transition or economic growth.

In my use of ‘sacrifice’, I move away from the more extreme forms of environmental and social effects described by Lerner (2012) and Klein (2015) and instead move towards a wider sense of sacrifice. To me, this sense of sacrifice indicates an idea that something must be given up to gain something better, not only in the interest of economic growth but also in the name of an abstract idea of local development. This notion of sacrifice can also be internalised among people living within a peripheral area targeted for resource extraction, as they regard sacrifice as the only plausible path for development, or at the very least, survival, as I show in paper II. Landström (2023) argues that this view on resource extraction can be seen as a way to assure continuity, that things that you value, such as a closeness to nature, will still be available to you if you give up the land needed for a mine.

When constructed as a *glesbygd* that has been ‘left behind’ in relation to the modern and developed city, rural areas are defined as places in need of development (Forsberg 1996; Arora-Jonsson 2013). This notion, as I go on to show, is not only assigned from the outside, but can also exist within rural communities, where the continued existence of the community is understood to depend on a willingness to sacrifice in the name of development and survival.

Throughout the papers, I show a connection between development, notions of being left behind, and resource extraction. In the next section I explore this relationship further and discuss the links between mining and development.

4.2.2 Mining and Development

Mining is inherently an unsustainable practice, in so far as it targets non-renewable resources that after a period of extraction will be depleted.⁷ This strains the relationship between development and mining, especially in relation to sustainability. Coming from a global perspective on the relationship between mining and development, Pijpers (2022) argues that the wealth that resource extraction is thought to generate is often understood in terms of development. In this research, the linkage between natural resource extraction and development becomes clear in a perspective where natural

⁷ The renewability of mineral resources has been complicated by economic perspectives that argue that mineral new mineral resources become available as prices shift. What is considered a resource then is fluid, and dependent on economical, political and technological factors. According to this perspective, new minerals are formed and reformed as markets, political relations and new technologies for extraction become change or become available.

resource wealth is supposed to help kickstart development as both extraction and refinement of extracted resources is supposed to generate wealth across scales (Kirsch 2014; Haikola & Anshelm 2016; Bebbington & Humphreys-Bebbington 2018).

Historically, the relationship between resources dependence and wealth has been shown to often be the reverse; poverty and dependence. But the idea of development remains strong and green extraction is another re-invention of the extractivist imperative, as I discuss in paper III. Merino (2020) has argued that claims to land can be motivated through government policies and practices that accentuate the importance of the role of resource extraction in the pursuit of economic growth, e.g. in the natural resource management policies of national governments. Here lies a connection between development and mining, as developmental ideas can be used to legitimise possession over resource rich yet ‘underdeveloped’ areas.

Furthermore, development on a national and, through discourses such as the green transition, even global scale can be used to ratify mining. Using an example from northern Sweden, Åhren and Lawrence (2017) have shown how the Swedish state, in a continuation of colonial practices that seek to extract natural resources from indigenous lands in northern Sweden, uses mining policy to reduce indigenous rights to one interest among many. In their overview of the expansion of mining within Europe del Marmol and Vaccaro (2020) find that the hunt for new minerals to extract is likely to spur on such processes of internal colonisation, in the wake of the green transition.

With the green transition, development through mining also raises questions about sustainability. Skorstad et al. (2018), have amassed examples from resource driven development in the Arctic, and have explored the relationship between mining and sustainability and points out that mining is inherently an activity that radically transforms the environment, often to detrimental effect. Furthermore, mining might also be impossible to combine with other forms of land use, not least open pit mining, effectively excluding other development trajectories and increasing the dependency on mineral extraction. In Sweden, the connection between mining and development has generated research that can be divided into several fields. Below, I present three themes of research that links up development and mining, albeit in different ways.

First, research has focussed on development of employment and changes to labour markets at local and regional levels (Ejdemo & Söderholm 2011;

Horsley *et al.* 2015; Tano *et al.* 2016; Hedin & Ranängen 2017; Moritz *et al.* 2017; Tarras-Wahlberg *et al.* 2017) and suggests that mining indeed may be a boost for local economies but it also creates a situation where communities are precariously dependent on mining for their livelihoods (Poelzer & Ejdemo 2018). Studying the development of a mine in Pajala, northern Sweden, Haikola and Anshelm (2018) describe how local expectations of benefits from a mine are shaped by a multiplicity of actors (i.e., the mining companies, state institutions, expert consultants, and local community actors) who together produce vibrant visions of the future where the new mine drives off problems that the community and local government faced previously. They show that these visions are often persistent even in the event of failure, e.g., when a mining company declares bankruptcy without having delivered any of the promises of economic growth or continuation of social services. In this research, mining and development are understood in terms of economic growth and the strengthening of local, regional, and national economies. The nature of development is, however, not explored in-depth, as the focus of these studies is to uncover if and how mining in fact delivers on its promises or not, e.g., whether mining actually leads to development, understood as a strengthening of the local economy through employment.

Second, there is extensive research on indigenous livelihoods and land rights (Persson & Öhman 2014; Ojala & Nordin 2015; Kløcker Larsen *et al.* 2016; Åhren & Lawrence 2017; Lindahl *et al.* 2018; Lawrence & Moritz 2019; Österlin & Raitio 2020; Kløcker Larsen & Raitio 2022). In these studies, the core focus lies at the intersection between mining as a form of land use and disruptive force that interferes with indigenous actors' access to land and disrupt indigenous culture. The creation of new mines is partly understood as furthering a history of colonial practices, where indigenous rights are ignored, lost, or transformed into 'interests' rather than rights, in order to support industrial investment on indigenous lands. International research on mining has shown that mineral extraction has had a particularly severe impact on indigenous people across the globe in recent years, as indigenous lands have increasingly been targeted for mining (Kirsch 2014; Willow 2018). At the same time, indigenous movements responding to these incursions create political platforms and produce alternative pathways to development (see for example Abram 2016; Sehlin MacNeil & Inga 2019).

A third strand of research that sometimes overlaps with the other two focusses on community participation and (mainly social) sustainability (Tarras-Wahlberg 2014; Poelzer 2015; Suopajärvi *et al.* 2016; Tarras-Wahlberg *et al.* 2017; Jagers *et al.* 2018; Segerstedt & Abrahamsson 2019). This research investigates the room for participation and the possibility of sustainable development in relation to ongoing or developing mining projects (Lindahl *et al.* 2018; Johansson *et al.* 2022). Taken together, these three strands of mining research represent different aspects of the relationship between mining and development, yet all three show how mining can be understood as an external and disruptive force where an external interest in mineral extraction enters a rural area. Mining, and thus also development, is enacted from the outside and ‘from above’. In some research, participation or distribution of resources may benefit the host area, but especially the indigenous literature remains highly critical of the very idea of extractive industries development, as indigenous living and the mining economy frequently clash and prove to be incompatible.

4.3 Territory, Land, and Property

As the research above shows, both mining and development are inherently spatial practices. They take place in a particular space, and in so doing, lay claims to that space. In this section I discuss how this claiming of space can be understood through theories on territory and territorialisation. I will also discuss how this tie in with what unfolds in an open moment (see also paper I).

Simply put, territory is space claimed and bounded, produced through power relations between actors. Territories, as geographers argue, are instilled with meaning, regulated, and controlled by people and institutions (Delaney 2008; Storey 2012; Storey 2020). Delaney (2008) argues that territories reflect the social order that create them. From this follows that when open moments emerge and social order is disrupted, territories might also be unsettled. It is the linkage between power and space, exclusion and inclusion that makes territory a useful concept in relation to development, as ideas of development divide space into developed and undeveloped territories.

Traditionally, territory has been linked to state power and the ways in which states control their sovereign space (*ibid.*). Control and governance

of resources is also important in terms of how the territorial state emerges and is produced. As Vandergeest and Peluso (1995) have shown in their work on state power in Thailand, territories are social constructs that are not static but continually produced through actors (such as states) exerting power over space, thereby territorialising it. Painter (2010), studying spatial power in government practices, argues that it is through processes like maintaining infrastructure, policing borders, and regulating taxes that territorial orders come into being. These processes are expressions of territoriality, acts that produce territory as (Sack 1983). From this follows that territory arises from practices, rather than being an object or physical space (Brighenti 2010).

Territories are also produced at the level of communities or even between individuals as they divide spaces among themselves (e.g., my garden as opposed to your garden) (Storey 2020:20). Antonsich (2011) invites us to consider territory as ‘peopled space’ where the territories are enacted through everyday relations between people as they create boundaries of inclusion and exclusion and define and give meaning to space. Feminist geographers in particular have shown how territory is intertwined with personal identities and bodies, and that control over bounded space is linked to identity (Wastl-Walter & Staeheli 2013; Smith *et al.* 2016). As we show in paper I, through the maintenance of a territory, identities are constructed and/or reinforced (see also Storey 2020:167).

Drawing from indigenous and post-colonial thinking on territory, (Halvorsen 2019) moves beyond the state centric approach to territory as he suggest that territory can be understood as ‘space appropriated for a political project’. This wide definition allows for two things. Firstly, it makes it possible to include a multiplicity of territorialisers, both governmental and non-governmental. Secondly, it invites us to consider the different ways in which people make claims to space, moving beyond those methods used by state actors, as we show in paper I.

By tracing territorial practices from below and from above, it becomes possible to follow how actors make claims to, and construct space differently. One example that combines the above and below is Sápmi, the traditional homeland of the Sami. This is a territory constructed through state actions through the administration of the Sami Parliament, but also from the below through a shared indigenous culture and political struggles led by the Sami, to have indigenous rights to land acknowledge.

In his work on the genealogy of territory, Elden (2013) argues that the production of territory is contingent on knowledge production, or to put it another way, technologies and methods that we use to measure and control land give shape to territory. Here there is a link to what scholars of rural development have shown regarding spatial justice and territorial cohesion in the European Union (Demeterova *et al.* 2020; Mahon *et al.* 2023). This research shows how top-down EU policies both define and put limits on what development is, ignoring local nuances and needs.

In line with Blomley (2022:12) I would also suggest that territorial imaginaries do ideological work. By this I mean that territories become naturalised, so that they appear to be static, stable, and part of a 'natural territorial order'. For example, when a certain way of defining territory becomes hegemonic, so does land use associated with that territorial definition. In her work on mining in Ecuador, Vela-Almeida (2018) shows how state practices in different ways help naturalise mining as a predominant way of using land, effectively creating what she calls 'mining territories' where alternative pathways of development become alien. Vela-Almeida's work also invites us to consider the role of land in a territorial sense. Land, as Storey (2012) points out, is the material aspect of territory. In their work on land control, Peluso and Lund (2011:673) have argued that 'territory is power relations written on the land', emphasising that claims to land are realised through processes of territorialisation.

The relationship between land and territory becomes especially obvious in matters of property. Property is here understood as a social relation in which an actor holds an enforceable claim to an entity (e.g., a parcel of land) (Macpherson 1978). This also means that there must exist an 'enforcer' that is regarded as an authority by the actors involved, e.g., a state. The relation between state authority and property rights is based on an interdependent relationship where rights become enforceable through state authority, but state authority is at the same time dependent on a collective recognition that the state is a legitimate actor to wield that authority (see Sikor & Lund 2009; Lund 2016).

Similar to territory, property is produced through social relations between people, and those empowered with property rights hold a position of power in these relations (Blomley 2022:19). According to Blomley (2015) the connection between property and territory shows that property rights may

be seen as enforceable claims to territory. That means that through property relations, land is territorialised and incorporated in a territorial order.

Legal scholar Rose (1994) has shown, community norms are also central in shaping property regimes. She shows how property rights are in fact dependent on the ability of an actor to persuade others that such rights exist. In such deliberations the identity of the persuader becomes important as property relations are shaped and give shape to power structures along lines of race, gender, class (Blomley 2022:20).

Since property is a social construct reliant on an established order, the social context wherein property rights are produced are key to understanding claims to rights, which is made evident in research on how property is viewed differently in indigenous contexts (see for example Bebbington *et al.* 2008; Åhren & Lawrence 2017; Anthias 2019). Anthias (2019) in her work on indigenous lands in Bolivia has shown that even if property rights are supplied by a state they are produced within a Western liberal understanding of property, which generates a dichotomy in the relationships between the human and the non-human. This has, as Watson (2002) argues from the perspective of colonial Australia, repercussions on how indigenous lands are viewed, where state power creates boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, (i.e., reterritorialising it) where such lines did not exist prior colonisation. Acknowledging the limitations of property, Ribot and Peluso (2003; 2020) suggest that we instead focus on people's *access* to land, where access is defined as the ability to benefit from a thing. Territory and territorialisation thus become ways to mitigate access, even beyond the bounds of property, as we show in paper I.

As explored in paper III and IV, indigenous research in Sápmi has shown, there exists on an ontological level different forms of worlding where land is not regarded as a resource for utilisation but part of a set of interdependent relations between the human and the non-human (Ween and Lien 2017; Joks *et al.* 2020; Sehlin MacNeil and Inga 2019).

Here there is a connection between space and development, where the latter understood in terms of how people visualise the places where they want to live, connected to their hopes and dreams about a different future (Arora-Jonsson 2013). Writing about alternative pathways for development, from the perspective of women anti-extraction activists in Peru, Jenkins (2024:5) argues that: 'Without hope – for different futures, alternative presents, – development ceases to have any meaning'.

5. Methodology and Research Design

This chapter begins with a presentation of my research design and the methods that I have used to answer my research questions. It then continues with a presentation of methods and material. I conclude with a reflexive discussion of my own positionality and ethical considerations.

5.1 Research Design

5.1.1 A Case Study Approach

I begin this section with a caveat: this thesis has not had a straightforward design but has rather emerged through a process of twists and turns, a continual evaluation of questions and aim, the choice of theories, as well as changes in the fieldwork, such as adapting to the Covid-19 pandemic. As Lund (2014) points out in his article on the case study design, a research project moves between theoretical questions and empirical observation, the abstract and the concrete. To me, it seems that there are only two points where the research design is well trimmed: in the research proposal and when the research is finalised. Although I find myself at the latter point, I am more concerned with sharing the process which have led me to my research results. I wish to provide a chronology over how the thesis developed over time, an explanation of what I did, and why I did it.

The PhD began as part of the research project *Restructuring the Rural North – Tensions and Prospects for Sustainable Development*, wherein Rönnebäcken was identified as an empirical case. In this sense, it was already decided that at least part of the thesis would take the form of a case study. Here I take inspiration from Gerring's (2004:342) definition of a case study as an 'intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units'. Or to put it in simpler terms: by looking at the

Rönnbäcken mining project, how can we understand the relationship between the extractive industries and sustainable development? When I set out to design my fieldwork I began by looking at people who had taken some kind of public stance in relation to the mines. I then began to trace their connections to other people: what government institutions were being referred to and what texts and maps were seen as important. This approach sometimes made it hard to put limits on an increasingly sprawling material and during the fieldwork I sometimes found myself interviewing people or looking into material where the mining projects were only lightly touched on while other matters, such as the history of the place, pastime activities, or thoughts about nature took centre place.

When I designed the fieldwork, my first task was to understand the context of Rönnbäcken and the surrounding area. Initially, I asked a set of guiding questions, specifically thinking about ‘What happens to people’s lives when living with the mining project?’ ‘How do they understand the project?’, ‘What positions do people take, and how do they motivate these positions?’. I was also interested in questions about the context people lived in. I asked, ‘What kind of place is Storuman?’ ‘Who are the people who live there?’ ‘What does their everyday lives look like?’ ‘How do people relate to each other?’. These questions, together with the focus on a geographically defined area led me towards an open-ended ethnographic approach to the case study, where interviews and participant observation would be the dominant methods (c.f. Hammersley & Atkinson 2007). The ethnographic case study approach allowed me to, as Murchison (2010:4) states, study culture in action. It became a way to discover and analyse those questions that lie close to heart for the people studied, illuminating local ways of understanding what unfolds around them (ibid:12). I then set out to locate the field.

5.1.2 Locating the Field

In one sense, the field was already defined by the overarching project. I was to study what happened around the Rönnbäcken area. I began with a desktop review of newspaper articles, social media posts, previous research (Lindahl *et al.* 2016a), and journalistic work on the Rönnbäcken case (Müller 2014; Tidholm 2014; Müller 2015) which indicated that this would be a matter where theories of property, land, environmental governance, identity, and territory could do analytical work. I prepared myself accordingly, meaning reading up on these concepts.

The first visit to the field lasted for two weeks in 2018, when semi structured interviews were conducted which generated new understandings of the 'field'. Another major outcome was that I decided to expand the case of Rönnbäcken with two more mining projects, Kyrkberget and Barsele. There were three reasons for this. Firstly, in interviews with local government representatives the projects in Kyrkberget and Barsele were described as having more onsite activity compared to Rönnbäcken, and the companies had regular contact with the local government, which I found relevant for the study.

Secondly, the Rönnbäcken mine was somewhat dormant when I started the fieldwork and the conflict had quietened down since the height of turmoil in 2016, which I describe in the background. Curiosity about what goes on during the making of a mine and a (perhaps misguided) need for action turned my eyes to the other two sites, which were then more active.

Thirdly, while the projects in Barsele and Kyrkberget were active and had reached the same legal status as the Rönnbäcken project, they had not generated the same level of protest, which provided an opportunity for comparison between the cases. This meant that the field could now be divided into three field sites, one for each project (see map in 3.4) and each with its specific conditions and experiences. At the same time I was interested in Storuman municipality as a whole, since the role of local government stood out as important for the progress of all three projects. In a sense, Storuman municipality became a fourth geographical area of interest, which connected the three sites.

Through the scoping fieldwork it became obvious that the mining projects affected and were affected by several parts of local government, making municipal politics and administration an important factor in matters of development and environmental governance. It was also obvious that to the people living in proximity to the mining projects, the municipality was seen as an important representative of the government apparatus. Apart from being relatively close to each other and sharing a connection through the local government, the three cases also share another important geographical characteristic that informed my decision to include them all in the project. All three are located within Sápmi, which makes them comparable incursions into traditional Sami land (see also 3.1).

With the expansion of two new mining cases came new villages and areas where I needed to do interviews and observations. As a result, I divided my

attention so that I could do fieldwork in the villages closest to the mining sites, and I decided to stay for at least two weeks in each place. The rest of the time I lived in Storuman town, using it as my base of operations as I carried out interviews across the municipality. Furthermore, being the closest thing to an urban centre, I was also curious to know how people living in Storuman regarded the projects.

During the thesis research I made four visits to the field from April 2018 to March 2020. After the scoping fieldwork in 2018 I made one visit in February 2019, one in June 2019, and one from February to March in 2020. The second and third visit lasted for one month each while the final lasted for one and half month. This scheduling was made in part for personal reasons, and in part to extend the time I could spend in the field to a couple of years. The initial plan was to spend an additional four weeks in the field, but this was cut short due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which reached Sweden during my final visit that lasted from February to March 2020.

5.1.3 Sampling: Chain Referrals and 'Visiting'

My initial research participants were selected from people who had publicly taken a stance for or against at least one of the projects, or somehow were involved in their management or governance. This meant contacting members of the resistance movement in Rönnbäcken, local politicians, and representatives of the municipal administration. I also engaged with people from the villages where the projects are located, first by contacting heads of village associations or similar organisations and then asking them to refer me to other potential research participants, who they saw as having something important to contribute.

This sampling method, which Bernard (2011:192) calls chain-referral, has the benefit of quickly expanding the number of research participants that might have an opinion regarding the subject you are studying. But, as Bernard points out, it does not give a broad representation of a larger population, as people tend to refer to people coming from the same class, educational background, ethnicity, gender, and so on. However, in Storuman, this was not a serious problem since many participants referred me to people with conflicting opinions to their own. In this way, the pool of respondents grew to cover different positions in relation to the mining projects. Nevertheless, it soon became obvious that men tended to refer other men,

meaning that I had to make an effort to expand the pool of participants to include women.

Another limitation of the chain-referral sampling strategy is that it mainly involves people who, for one reason or another, have expressed a strong opinion on the subject that you are interested in. Recognising this, and the fact that the local organisations were situated in a context where micro-politics steered who I was referred to, I also adapted my approach by walking around in the villages, talking to people I met in the streets. By doing this I could gain some insight into the views of people who I would otherwise have missed.

Due to the role played by property ownership in defining who was considered a stakeholder in the development of the mining projects, I was interested in speaking to landowners. This, however, was more of a challenge than I had initially anticipated. I was sometimes referred to landowners through the chain-referral, but in some cases, owners were hard to reach and make appointments with. During the last field-visit I found a strategy to circumvent this problem – the ‘visiting’ strategy. I had walked around knocking on doors to see if people unreachable by phone would be available for an interview, but found that it rarely led to any conversations as few people answered the door. This changed during one attempt when an elderly woman in Blaiken opened the door and invited me inside. There she was joined by her husband who, after a formal invitation to join them for coffee, explained that the custom in these parts was to open the door and announce yourself, without waiting for someone to open. He explained that the only people who knocked are salesmen or faith peddlers, and that people rarely opened the door for either. In contrast, those who step inside, announce themselves, and act friendly probably have an important reason for their visit.

Slightly uncomfortable, I took up the local practice of ‘visiting’ and suddenly I gained access to people who previously had eluded me. These were predominantly the homes of elderly people or landowners living in the villages. When the owner of the house or someone of their extended family were in, they would in most cases welcome me inside and offer me a cup of coffee, as was the local custom. During such visits, I could add a couple of interviews to the project through further chain-referrals. However, the practice of visiting was not to last. With the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, this practice quickly became unethical and during the last two weeks of my last visit I could no longer do it.

5.2 Methods and Material

In this section I discuss how the participant observations and the interviews were (or were not) carried out, the style of questioning, and my thoughts on the methods. I follow this with a presentation of the role of written material and conclude the section with a reflection on the use and analysis of narratives.

5.2.1 Interviews

Interviews have been the dominant data collection method in the thesis. My choice of conducting a study that was predominantly based on interviews had both practical and epistemological reasons. Practical, because due to the size of the field, with multiple sites, in-depth ethnographic observations became a challenge, and my interest in including many different actors across Storuman meant that I needed a more targeted approach. Epistemological, because I wanted collect information about people's experiences, both of their everyday lives and their specific thoughts regarding the mining projects. The interviews can be divided into formal interviews, and more informal conversations, although there is only a fine line dividing them. The difference between them has mainly been my mode of approach. In formal interviews, the research participant was contacted beforehand, I presented myself and my main interests, and allowed the respondent some time to prepare (c.f., Murchison 2010:101). These interviews were always (after the interviewees approval) recorded.

During the informal conversations, I approached the interviewee on the street or by visiting their homes. As with the formal interviews, I always presented myself and my reasons for being in Storuman, but due to the ad hoc nature of these meetings, they did not follow the same structure. I rarely knew beforehand who I would be talking to, and the conversations covered a wider range of topics, where I would let the research participant take the lead. Yet, in both the formal and informal setting I followed a similar set of questions.

Wanting to get to know the person, the context as they saw it, and how they experienced the mines, I took inspiration from the phenomenologically informed qualitative interview as characterised by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009:42–54). The central focus was on descriptive aspects of the informant's lifeworld and the meanings they assigned to certain themes (such as the mining projects). Rather than following a strict set of questions, we

discussed themes and through this interpersonal experience I gained new insights. My position was that of ‘curious nativity’ where I strove to be open for my respondents’ ways of explaining events, rather than providing pre-established themes (ibid:43). I wanted to learn more about their views and positions, rather than asserting my own position. That being said, I sometimes would take on the role of devil’s advocate, in order to understand how they argued against an opposing view.

The interview questions were designed to let the interviewee present a narrative of events (c.f., ibid:171). After my initial presentation I generally began by asking them about themselves, how they came to live in this place, what they did for a living, how they spent their days, and about important relationships. In these initial questions the meanings of home, relations to land, and community often came up. This set of questions were used for almost all interviews to understand some of the research participant’s backgrounds. I then moved on to more specific questions. For example, if the interviewee was a politician, I asked how they came to be in politics, how they developed their particular political viewpoint. We then moved on to the mining projects, where I asked them about how they perceived them, how they influence their lives and the lives of people living in Storuman. This opened up for questions about development, about land use, environmental governance, and access to land. When the conversation died down, often because I felt that we had reached a saturation point regarding my questions but in a few cases due to time constraints, I asked if they were missing any questions, if they could refer me to someone who they thought I should talk to, and if they would be willing to participate in a follow up interview.

Towards the end of the fieldwork, I had amassed 77 interviews. These included conversations with local politicians, reindeer herders, representatives from indigenous associations, civil servants at the municipality, mining company representatives, local business owners, landowners, homeowners, summer guests, people in unemployment programs, and representatives of forestry associations. These categories are not exclusive and overlap. 14 of the interviewees were interviewed more than one time. Out of the 77 informants 30 were women and 47 men. Their ages ranged from 93 to 16, with a median age of 56. In terms of education, 33 had vocational education or training, while 44 had university or college degrees. Of the 13 that self-identified as Sami, 5 were women and 8 were men. A table of the interviews can be found in Appendix 1.

It should be noted that I had a particularly hard time reaching Sami reindeer herders from both Vapsten and Ubmeje RHAs. While I did interview one member of Ubmeje and one of Vapsten Lappby it was hard, even through referral, to get hold of active reindeer herders. During my interview with the member from Ubmeje, it became clear that time constraints and a form of fatigue with both researchers and state officials could explain their unwillingness to participate in the study. It was explained to me that herders are constantly tending to their herds, while at the same time needing to respond to the myriad of incursions on the grazing lands where they are considered to be stakeholders. This leaves little time and patience for research requests. Although I tried to reach out to different members of the villages this was to little avail, and in order to not put undue pressure on the RHAs, I refrained from pressing the matter.

Most of the interviews were recorded, although in some instances, such as when an informal conversation became more interview-like, I only took notes to not disturb the conversations as I found that the recording device emphasised the interviewer-interviewee relationship, which made some people uncomfortable. In some cases, I chose to take notes after the interview was done, either by writing it down or recording myself.

5.2.2 Participant Observation

Throughout the fieldwork I also carried out participant observations. Participant observation meant that I could get a deeper contextual understanding of Storuman and its surrounding villages, including people's pastimes and everyday life. As what Bernard (2011:260) calls a participant observer, I assumed the role of an outsider who observed and recorded the aspects of life around me. In a wide sense, participant observation was about being there, in Storuman, experiencing everyday life as it unfolded. This I did by staying in the villages, visiting local cafés and shops, talking to the people I met in the street, and engaging in conversations with my different hosts as they invited me for dinner or a cup of coffee. Emerson *et al.* (2011:17) argue that this approach is about intuitively figuring out what is important in people's lives, how they construct their social relationships, and how they relate to events. Emerson *et al.* (ibid:19) argue that this attention to the everyday can be separated from *events*, situations where certain aspects of life are highlighted, such as how people view the governance of nature, or how they deal with conflicting political interests.

While in Storuman, I encountered some such events which I have chosen to single out. These events are included in table 2.

Table 2. Observations.

Place	Activity
Barsele	Visited drilling rig at exploration site
Skellefteå	OECD conference on mining and sustainable development
Stockholm	The Sami national day, lecture on sustainable development
Storuman	2x town council meetings
Storuman	Public lecture on Sami cultural heritage
Storuman	Morning service at church
Storuman	Viewing of ice hockey game at the hotel
Storuman	Meeting of the municipal committee for Sami issues
Tärna	Public lecture by Arne Müller
Tärna	Afternoon service at church
Tärnamo	Guided tour to Rönnbäcken
Tärna	Bowling night
Blaiken	Visited the abandoned mine
Svärträsk	Visited the abandoned mine

These events helped me understand how people interacted when issues such as Sami rights, public planning, sustainable development, mining politics, and the mining projects in Storuman were discussed or otherwise articulated. For example, when I attended the morning service at the church in Storuman, the priest began talking about the industrialisation of Norrland and the rights of nature. In his sermon, and the following conversation, feelings of being used by the nation state crystalised and became obvious for me. The insights garnered at this church service became useful in all the papers, as they gave me some partial insights into how people related to the governance of their environment.

The two last observations in table 2 stand out from the rest, as I did those alone, walking around the abandoned sites. These two visits gave me a better understanding of the social and material impact of the mines and how people felt about these sites, as it became easier for me to imagine them in my conversations with my informants.

The observations were recorded in my field journals. My notes differed slightly depending on whether they were records of what had happened

during a specific event, where I made more detailed notes, or longer reflections on what had unfolded during one or two days.

5.2.3 Method of Analysis

Throughout the thesis I use *narrative(s)* as a focus for my study. I understand narratives as storied ways of communicating, and that the production of narrative is a process in which the teller places events in sequence in order for them to make sense to their intended audience (c.f. Roe 1994; Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). Correspondingly, narratives are stories through which the producer of the narrative makes sense of their own experiences. When talking to people, recording or writing down their stories, I have been attentive to recurring narratives and have grouped these together to find common thematic elements that have made up the foundations of my later analysis. While my main interests has been in the mining projects, something that I have related to my interviewees, I have endeavoured to situate their stories about the projects in a wider context. Therefore, apart from asking questions about the mining projects, I have also made sure to talk about the interviewees lives in a broader sense. I have asked questions about their background, their relation to a given place, their upbringing, their pastime, and their relation to nature and land, and so on.

Taking inspiration from Roe (1994), I also treat policy documents as narratives that address certain issues and tend to be characterised by an opening (where the problem is stated), a middle (where the policy addresses the issue), and an end (where the policy has solved the issue). My interest in policy narratives has led me to collect and read texts, such as municipal strategies for mining investments, and incorporate them into my narrative analysis.

From the interviews I then identified common themes (e.g., stories about a colonial past, mining as development or feelings of being left behind). With these themes, I could then construct meta-narratives that drew on several interviews as well as material that I could find in other sources, such as newspaper articles or blogposts. These meta-narratives were then analysed. This analysis was done by putting the meta-narratives and experiences in conversation with the concepts outlined in chapter 4.

6. Discussion

In this chapter, I return to the aim of this thesis, and explore how extractive interventions shape rural places in times of transition. I begin by discussing the entanglements between people and land that can shape rural areas in the context of the green transition. Secondly, I turn to discuss the reconfigurations of territory and identity that can be seen in the material. Finally, I turn to a discussion of the conceptualisation of rural development that comes into being across different groups and subjectivities, in the shadow of the potential mines.

Throughout the discussion, the presence of the mining projects can be felt. Therefore, I would like to begin with a note on what kind of entities these three projects are and how I came to encounter them in Storuman.

During the fieldwork I began to understand that the mining projects in Storuman were situated in networks of relations that connect actors across places and scales. In one sense, they could be regarded as localised materialisations of these networks which were attached to specific places. By this I mean that the mines were named after the locations where they are proposed, and these were also the sites where the most immediate and material effects of the activities associated with the mines could be felt.

From a different perspective, the mines reached far beyond their project sites. This could be seen in the way that a particular project connected investors to an area of extraction far removed from their computer screens where they did their trading. Likewise, the projects generated local struggles that led to positionality on the ground but also connected the mining sites to global movements for indigenous rights. The mining projects appeared in court room proceedings, in newspapers and on radio broadcasts, both for regional and national audiences. In the following discussion, the mines are presented simultaneously in a state of potentiality or ‘becoming’, not fully

formed as operational mines and yet they are substantial enough for people to imagine and relate to them as such. The mines, while not yet being actual mines, in these ways have various effects on the ground, in financial markets and in court rooms, to name but a few locations. As the potential mines emerge on the ground, they are entangled in these webs of relations and create new ones. And at the same time, at the heart of these relations is a connection to land and who has a right to claim it and for what purposes. In the following sections, I explore these entanglements and how they shape notions of development, environmental governance, and territory.

6.1 Entanglements of History and Identity at the Edge of the State

In this section I turn to some of the important connections between people and their environment that shape rural areas in the North of Sweden, as I set out to answer my first research question. I pay particular attention to narratives that show how people's lives are entangled with relations to land and perceptions of living in the 'glesbygd', far from the urban centres of power in the south. The relations that I present are central to the context in which the mining projects enter and develop and, importantly, aspects that form both responses to the mining projects and the way people frame their views on development, governance and whose knowledge is recognised as important. I outline a set of stories that show how social and material entanglements shape rural areas in the North of Sweden. We can think of these stories, as we do in paper I, as a set of territorial narratives that people draw on as they make claims to space. Tracing these narratives can be a way to uncover how both relations between people and land are renegotiated in the shadow of the mining projects. Although the presence of the mining projects are felt throughout the text, my main objective has been to provide the background needed to understand how and why people take up positions around the mining projects. I now turn to what happens as the open moments unfold, when relations that regulate access to land change as they are challenged and made uncertain – the hallmark of an open moment.

6.1.1 Histories of Colonialism and Tensions

By the end of my fieldwork, I had taken to showing up unannounced at people's houses. During one of these visits, I found myself in a house on the shores of Björkvattnet where four people were furnishing their home as they had recently moved there from a nearby village. I walked inside and announced myself whereupon a young woman who I had never met and who was busying herself in the kitchen replied 'Oh, are you dropping by? Welcome!'.

To my everlasting surprise, this type of response was not as uncommon as one might think, and I went inside. I explained why I was walking around the villages, wanting to know more about people's perceptions of the mining projects, and she invited me to join them for coffee and soon we were discussing the implications of the opening of the Rönnbäcken mine, a project that would unfold roughly about ten kilometres from where we were sitting. Apart from the woman and myself, there were an elderly couple, a man and a woman related to the younger woman, as well as her husband at the kitchen table. All were of Sami descent. In our conversation it became obvious that they saw the mine as yet another incursion on Sami lands, the latest chapter in a colonial history marred by forced relocations, confiscation of land, and exploitation of natural resources.

My hosts likened the mine to the development of hydropower along the Umeå River in the 1950's and 60's that saw many who lived along the riverbanks lose their homes due to flooding. During this period people were visited in their homes by representatives of the Swedish state, and according to my interlocutors the state had used abrasive and underhanded methods to get their will through, like tricking people into signing papers that led to the removal of property rights with little compensation. This is neither the first nor the last time I heard this story and it is often accompanied by a retelling of a history of other forms of colonial abuse, like the loss of reindeer grazing lands, encounters with racial biologists, and lasting scars of Swedish segregation and assimilation policies that have shaped Sami society (Lundmark 2006 ; Lantto 2012 ; Lantto 2014).

This long history of infected relations with government authorities and external actors making claims to land in Björkvattnet have shaped identities in the valley. During an interview with John, a middle-aged Sami man from the valley, he explained that government interventions had fostered a form of unruliness among the population. He explained that in Björkvattnet you

speak out against the authorities, as a response to how people have been treated throughout history. Rather than accepting what is seen as state intrusions on the land, the people of the valley mobilise to protect their interests. Yet, John continued, there are few who stop to ask themselves why people react in the ways they do.

Although the mining project in Rönnbäcken in some ways represents something new it must also be understood in a context where a colonial history is very tangible and part of everyday life. As John indicates, the relationship between state authority and access to land is a point of contention (c.f., Peluso & Ribot 2020). Perhaps most pertinent in this is John's question about why people have become so wary of incursions on their lands, and how this links into how people both perceive themselves and are perceived by others, linking access to land with identity and history.

The unruliness of the people of the mountains were sometimes remarked upon by people living in the eastern parts of the municipality. In 2019 I interviewed Ulrik, an elderly farmer who owned land outside Gunnarn and who was very sceptical about the mining project. I asked why the responses to the mining projects present in Barsele and Gunnarn did not stir up the same type of protests and he explained that one reason could be that the people living inland had a slightly different history from those up in the mountains. Down in the forestlands people had developed a form of stoic endurance (paper I and II). There was a sense that they had seen it all before and although they were critical of the projects there was no point in dwelling on it too much. To the people in the villages, the mining projects' presence was seen as a consequence of living in an area which state policies treated like a colony, where natural resources were extracted to generate profits elsewhere, with little benefit to the local communities. At the same time Ulrik told me about his son who had taken over the family farm and whom I had tried to contact for an interview, but to no avail. He explained that his son's reluctance stemmed from the anxiety he felt when thinking about the mining project in Barsele. Whenever it was brought up, he turned a deaf ear and refused to talk about the potential changes that the mines could lead to. Ulrik's response was quite typical among the villagers in Barsele and Gunnarn and in the Kyrkberget project. The projects would provoke responses, even anger, yet it was not customary to mobilise into a protest movement. One reason given for this was the experience of the referendum on the nuclear waste storage facility in the 1990s which led to strong tensions

as people sided for or against the proposal, nearly splitting the municipal population in two. Not wanting to relive the type of strain this had put on the local communities, people in Barsele and Gunnarn felt that it was best to not take up any hard positions before the mine had further substantialised. The lack of response is therefore not due to a lack of interest, but rather a consequence of history, and an unwillingness to strain community relations that have deep historical roots.

6.1.2 Land, Belonging, and Identity

As the interviews demonstrated, the relationship between land and identity was deeply felt. In June 2019 I had been sitting at another kitchen table, this time in the home of Anni, one of the women leading the local resistance movement. Anni told me how the mining projects had become detrimental to people's health, causing depression and a sense of hopelessness as the future was made uncertain. Would this place, the valley with its lake and surrounding mountains, be a place where Sami children could live out their lives as their forefathers had, or would it be turned into an industrial wasteland, empty of life and culture? Anni could see how the mining projects led to this existential question over the right to exist in a place that she and her family had called home for generations. For her, resisting the mining projects was in many ways a fight for survival, a sentiment which she seemed to share with others in valley.

For Anni, the mining projects would destroy important relationships to the land. In an adjacent line of thought, in Barsele and Gunnarn the mining project was at times described as a break with previous land use and relations to land. In paper I and IV we refer to an old farmer in Gunnarn for whom forest property and management was intimately tied to his personal identity and family relations. He saw the land as an important part of his family history and central to who he was. The potential loss of land could not be reduced to an economic loss, but was seen as a disconnection from a personal history. He expressed a sense of belonging (Antonsich 2010) to the land and the place, and therefore, he reasoned, no economic compensation from the mining company would replace the loss of forest lands. What this shows is that property relations were embedded in family histories. Through conversation, which repeated itself as I talked to more landowners, I came to understand that property, in this case forests, had been central in shaping my

informants' identities and sense of belonging to not only their farms but their village and surrounding area.

To understand how the mining projects came to influence the lives of people in Storuman, the relationship between history and land use and how this formed peoples' identities cannot be disregarded. This relationship is perhaps most obvious in the open protests that formed around the Rönnbäcken project, where experiences of a colonial history was used as a basis for mobilisation and cohesion. This is not to say that there were no proponents of the mining project in the area. During the fieldwork, the hottest conflicts had cooled off, but people in Tärnaby and in Björkvattnet told me that there were still tensions between supporters and opponents to mining. The conflict had cut deep, sometimes severing family ties, and affecting perceptions of identity and how it related to access to land (see paper I).

In 2018 I had an interview with Jonas and Rikard. Jonas was an elderly man and the owner of a contractor company, where Rikard was employed. Natives to Björkvattnet, they were among those who had sided with the mining company regarding the development of the project. After a while our conversation turned to the issue about who should have a say over the matter when large industrial projects are planned. We touched upon the rights of property owners and the reindeer herding communities, but then our conversation turned towards a question of Sami identity. Jonas argued that he thought that although the RHAs should have a voice, based on their interests as land users, this should not be translated into a form of indigenous rights to land.

He connected the Sami identity to reindeer herding and was critical of people calling upon their Sami heritage to assert some form of right to land. Jonas explained that he had a shared ancestry with people in the valley who made claims to a Sami identity, while he regarded himself as first and foremost a Swede. But, he asked, why should their concerns be valued higher than his just because they made claims to a Sami identity?

Jonas' line of reasoning regarding the mining projects revealed a connection between indigenous identity and land rights and how the mining projects gave rise to questions about personal identity. In his eyes claims to being indigenous was done in the hope of acquiring influence over land matters. He was critical of this practice, preferring to see rights to land in terms of contemporary property rights, based on individual ownership – echoing the formal /state understanding of property.

Throughout all the field work the importance of relations to nature and land was emphasised. I want to point out the intrinsic part land, land use, and access to land plays in people's lives. But no less important was *they ways in which* people lived close to their environment, citing living with nature as one of the benefits of living in a rural area. A pastime that played a prominent role in in people's lives was 'being on the fell', meaning spending time on the sunny side of a mountain. This was predominantly done in springtime when sun and snow met on the mountainside. When asked what people valued in their life in the villages, activities such as hunting, fishing, and picking berries and mushrooms were recurringly referred to. Furthermore, the stories show different ways through which land was territorialised, and how layers of territories emerge as people lay claims to land in different ways, ranging from invoking a sense of belonging to property rights (paper I).

Property rights were the primary way in which control over land was maintained in Storuman. In these matters, the Swedish state is the enforcing actor and upholder of the normative system (i.e., state law) wherein property rights are anchored (c.f. Tamanaha 2008). When the mining projects entered the arena, property rights in Storuman came under threat as land deemed worthy of mineral exploration could be expropriated by the state and turned over to the mining company, as stipulated in the Mineral Act (1991:45). However, following Halvorsen's (2019) definition of territory as 'space appropriated for a political project' and Anthias (2019) insights into the limitations of property rights, a focus on property might be too narrow to understand how people both are affected by the mining projects and how they make claims to space as the stories of Ulrik, Anni and Jonas shows.

In paper I, we show how a multitude of actors mobilise different narratives to make claims to land, creating a web of overlapping and continually produced territorial configurations. In Björkvattnet, mining opponents drew on historic rights to land to resist the mining projects. Although their deeds to the land were no longer recognised by the Swedish authorities, they pointed to rights established through a relationship with the land since time immemorial, and strengthened these claims with old deeds and maps that show prior ownership of the land. The stance that property should not be reduced to an economic resource is perhaps most evident in Anni's explanation that rights to land is tied to the right to exist. What these examples indicate is that while property rights are central to land control,

recognised through state law, there are territorial configurations that go beyond the realm of property that may be just as important.

6.1.3 Environmental Governance at the Edge of the State

As indicated in some of the stories the mining projects were sometimes understood as expressions of colonial practices, made possible through state policies. The uneven relationship between the rural places in Storuman and what was perceived as an urban governing elite in the south of Sweden also fostered a view of being ‘left behind’ (Arora-Jonsson 2013) or not mattering beyond being a ‘smorgasbord for the Swedish state’ (Sörlin 2019). This in turn shaped how people thought about environmental governance. In February 2020, I visited the municipal administration to interview Jonathan, a civil servant working with planning issues. Jonathan talked about his experiences working in the municipal administration and he was frustrated about the centre-periphery relation between the State and the municipality, which he also connected to the mining projects.

From a municipal perspective, and a planning perspective, there are both conflicts and possibilities [with large scale industrial projects] But we, as a municipality, are also struggling with the central powers, that the state divide and conquer in municipalities... (Jonathan, Storuman, 2020)

By ‘divide and conquer’, Jonathan is referring to local conflicts that were created or exacerbated by state intervention. In this case, he was talking about a conflict in the ‘Municipal Committee for Sami Issues’⁸ where they had discussed what spelling (i.e., which Sami language) should be used to communicate the Sami name for Storuman Municipality. It was a minor conflict, but it goes to show how a history of state interventions, such as forced relocations of Sami groups (see Lantto 2014), have created a situation that complicates collaboration.

Jonathan then continues to discuss how present-day interventions, such as the mining projects, are examples of the limited power people have over their own environment:

⁸ The committee oversees that Sami interests are acknowledged in issues that lies within the municipal responsibility such as rights to having Sami languages taught at school or that Sami culture is protected in planning issues.

We are getting duped because we are small, and we don't think we can or that we have to fight each other over the breadcrumbs that falls down from the table rather than say "this is our damned table and if you want to eat from it you need to pay!". We don't hold that kind of power...but we should. (Jonathan, Storuman, 2020)

The sense of frustration that Jonathan is expressing was present in other interviews as well. In 2018 my colleague and supervisor Seema Arora-Jonsson interviewed a Sami woman who was a member of Vapsten RHA. She expressed the sense of having a limited sway over the environment that they were so dependent on and in extension this put limitations on their lives. This connection between land and identity, environment and life become emphasised as the mining projects enters Storuman.

On top of the active projects the two abandoned mines in Blaiken and Svärträsk made their presence felt in almost all conversations where the mining projects were covered. Open wounds in the land and in the memories of some, the dead mines were concerning in several ways. Firstly, it had become evident that they leaked toxic waste into the nearby water systems, damaging aquatic ecosystems. This was an obvious cause for concern, not only among those directly affected, but also among people living far from the sites who saw the unravelling disaster as a testament to the combination of irresponsible state policy and control, as well as the effects of letting loose opportunistic and negligent junior mining companies in the area. Secondly, the mines reaffirmed experiences of living with the negative consequences of resource extraction, as they were connected to ideas of a colonial relationship between the North and South. These experiences fed into an idea of living in an forgotten periphery, where lives and environment could be more readily sacrificed (Klein 2015:148; Skorstad *et al.* 2018) for the benefit of external actors and to the detriment of people in Storuman.

When the companies that owned the mines went bankrupt, all responsibility for the projects was shifted towards the taxpayers and the state. For the research participants, the abandoned mines were seen as cautionary tales of the devastating effects a badly managed mine might have. To those critical of the now active mining projects the dead mines became a way to reinforce their position, something concrete to point out while arguing that 'this is what happens when opportunist mining companies are let loose'. For proponents of mining, the potential mining projects needed to be disconnected from the mines in Blaiken and Svärträsk. For example, Erik, the chair of the

municipality, who saw the mining projects as potential engines for local economic development, explained that the failed mines would never have been allowed to open under current environmental legislation. His statement can be understood as an appeal to authority, referring to the expertise of the government apparatus in making decisions.

6.1.4 Expertise, Knowledge, and Time

In all the papers, it is shown that knowledge plays an intrinsic part in people's ability to gain or maintain access to land. In a sense, the struggles and tensions that arose around the mining projects could be seen as a tug-of-war over whose and what knowledge matters in relation to land. In this section I give some examples of how knowledge and knowledge production came to matter in relation to the mines.

By the time I set out in the field the most active project in the municipality was the gold exploration project outside the village Barsele, carried out by the Canadian company Agnico-Eagle (AE). In many of the interviews with local politicians and civil servants at the municipality it stood out as new form of exploration company, more serious and communicative. They had taken pains to clean up from previous exploration and had, according to the municipality, continuous discussions with landowners and the villages Barsele and Gunnarn. Mats, a civil servant working with environmental issues, told me that the company contacted the municipality as soon as there was as much as an oil spill from one of the machines. As far as he knew, the company almost swamped landowners with work plans and information about their activities. This, Mats thought, was not necessarily a good thing, as he believed that the landowners might not have enough knowledge about exploration practices, nor the time to respond to what was suggested or follow up on the company's activities. It should be noted that the practice of sending out workplans is a requirement in Swedish law, and the mining company was doing its due diligence. The idea is that landowners should be able to voice their concerns regarding the planned exploration, but they are not able to fully refuse exploration on their land.

Mats' concerns about a discrepancy between work plans and practices soon showed itself to be true in at least one case, which involved Vera, who had become a spokesperson on issues regarding the exploration activities on her father's lands. With a background in geobiology and a history of working for the mining industry, she had taken it upon herself to scrutinise the

Agnico-Eagles' activities in Storuman and she was very critical about the way they conducted themselves in the field. She told me that she believed that many landowners did not have the means (due to old age or lacking knowledge) to look up how the exploration activities impacted their forest lands, and could not assess the damages that the exploration created. Vera wanted to hold AE accountable to their actions and spent a lot of time following up on their workplans whenever she visited her father's farm. In Rönnbäcken, Anni related that she had educated herself about the processes involving mining operations, attended all the meetings she could manage, traveling to Stockholm to attend conferences where the mining company and Storuman municipality attended. Knowledge about local histories, indigenous politics and rights on a national and global scale, and the mineral and mining legislation became central in her endeavour to stop the activities in Rönnbäcken. Through her expertise she could challenge claims made by the municipal government, the mining company, and national government.

In both these cases it is not predominantly property rights and/or being identified as stakeholders that made these women influential, but rather their ability to mobilise their knowledge to tackle the mining projects. This was central to their ability to territorialise land, as we have shown in paper I, and in Anni's case, her attempts to show how claims to a green transition in fact was a prolongation of colonial practices (see paper IV).

Wielding knowledge was also central for the mining companies. During the time of the fieldwork, Agnico-Eagle differed from the other two projects in that they had a stronger presence in the field. The company had opened a local branch office and made sure to employ at least part of its staff locally, which garnered them some support. In an interview with the local chief of operations (COO) and a secretary at the branch office, they explained that the company organised regular meetings and attempted to be available for questions from concerned citizens. Although they acknowledged that there were people critical of the project, the COO regarded the relationship between the company, landowners, and villagers as mostly good and civil. In our interview, the tensions that I sensed in interviews elsewhere were not present.

Representatives from both AE and Bluelake Minerals stressed the importance of creating a welcoming political climate and good relations with the local government as well as the local population. The provision of knowledge, especially the 'right kind' of knowledge was according to them,

the best way to ensure this state of affairs. The reasoning was that if only people got rid of their misconceptions about mining, they would be more open to it.

Here, time became important for the representatives of the mining companies and the people affected by their presence. Proponents of mining who wanted to emphasise the benefits a mine could bring, looked to an imagined future where the mine became a success story. By doing this, they had to counter both the recent history of failed mines and the longer history of how resource extraction at best had limited positive effects for local communities, narratives that were mobilised by mining sceptics and opponents. In the interviews with the CEO of Bluelake Minerals and the COO of Agnico-Eagle, it became obvious that they felt that their projects should be detached from history. Both stressed the good relations they had with the municipal government and that they believed that, with enough interaction, they could get landowners and villagers to support their projects. When I asked what would happen if they could not manage this feat, they stated that it would be a matter for the court system and government agencies to sort out.

6.2 The Making of an Open Moment

In the following, I address my second research questions, and show how the potential for drastic transformation brought on by the mines can be understood as what I call an ‘open moment’. Drawing on what I have outlined in the previous sections of the discussion, I present how the mining projects came to transform territories, environmental governance, and development. I begin by discussing how the mining projects make people’s access to land uncertain and how this relates to relations between property rights and authority. I then move on to an explanation of how the open moments can help us understand how new territorial configurations come into being and how this can be useful when studying development.

6.2.1 Uncertainty and Territorial Reconfiguration

As the interviews indicate the projects portended dramatic changes in access to land and the governance and development of communities. When people living close to the different sites talk about the deliberations and conflicts, they kept returning to questions of land and access to it. Land use was deeply

connected to peoples' identities, their well-being, their hopes, dreams, and fears. When Jenny, a young politician who lived on a farm in Blaiken, was asked to summarise what she thought was the most important aspects to remember regarding the mining projects she focused on people's strong relationships to land.

I think that you must always remember when it comes to things like mining, that people who live in these areas have very strong opinions and that it can go very wrong if you treat them badly. You need to listen in and make sure that you can provide all the information people ask for and should have. And that this is a loaded subject, because that's the way it is with all issues concerning land and property. (Jenny, Blaiken, 2020)

During my time in Storuman, it became clear that people's experience of having these relationships challenged was leading to a sense of uncertainty about the future. This is where I begin to conceptualise the open moment. An open moment can be understood as an accumulation of smaller events which when shared becomes a collective experience defined by uncertainty about the future. An open moment is contextual, temporal, and situated, meaning that it is shaped by the social and material place where it occurs.

In Storuman, it was experienced both on an individual and a communal level as a state where multiple future trajectories open up in relation to the mining projects. This uncertainty ranged from questions about risks of environmental degradation, to potential forced relocations, and the rights to exist in a certain place. In a sense, living with the mining projects was an experience of living a life in limbo, a time marked with ambiguity, where many pathways of development manifested themselves, and some of which were seen as detrimental to the current way of life. However, this is not to say that an open moment is pacifying or reducing people's agency.

As we show in paper I, the opposite is true and open moments can be generative of action as actors attempt to understand, give meaning to, and steer the outcome of events. For example, in Rönnbäcken it led to the mobilisation of a resistance network, and across Storuman the municipal administration has organised meetings, created surveys, and held debates in the public forum regarding the mining projects. The goal of these activities is to take control of the future by asserting specific trajectories of development. I argue that open moments are creative spaces where the potential break with an established

order also means that new actors might emerge and have an unexpected impact on how the future unfolds. The open moment occurs when the potentiality for rapid change becomes substantial enough for people to identify a set of events as a potential dramatic change to the current order. Here I differentiate open moments from ruptures in that an open moment does not necessarily involve the breakdown of a previous social order, nor an actual crisis of nature (c.f. Lund 2016; Mahanty *et al.* 2023).

Jenny's statement about the centrality of property and land in relation to the mining projects suggests that territories, or claimed spaces (Storey 2020; Blomley 2022), can be useful to understand what unfolds in an open moment. In the next section I show how the open moment in Storuman can be seen as a disruption of territories and how it invites acts of territorialisation, where people make claims to land to promote particular development pathways.

In the theory chapter, I have argued that people can territorialise land by attaching their claims to normative systems, such as state law or customary rights (Rose 1994; Tamanaha 2008). In Storuman, this could for example be seen in the ways people drew on property deeds or made claims to an indigenous history to gain control over land (see paper I & IV). While territories are not static but continually produced through social interaction between people (Storey 2020) they stabilise over time, which become obvious in the cases where people invoke, a sense of belonging to certain territories (Antonsich 2010; 2011). This can be seen in how people attach land to personal identity, e.g., how indigenous lands in Rönnbäcken could not be reduced to economic relationships.

When the mining projects began to develop in Storuman, they too made claims to land, e.g., through exploration work plans or mining concession permits. Thus, they came to disrupt the established territorial order by replacing or diminishing property rights, in part by making access to land uncertain. This is where I see a connection between open moments and territorialisation. In Storuman, it became possible to regard what unfolds as an open moment because territorial configurations were destabilised as struggles over land intensified. Open conflict did occur, predominantly shown in the case of Rönnbäcken, but all three mining projects gave rise to an uncertainty over the access to land and people began to mobilise narratives that territorialises space in different ways in order to maintain access to land. The open moment creates the space for reconceptualising development and

shows why and how certain topics become politicised, debated and up for claims.

6.3 Conceptualising (Rural) Development Anew

In this section I turn to my third research question as I focus on the impacts that the presence of the proposed mines has for visions of development in Storuman, and how these visions become unveiled in the open moment. I show that while the argument that the potential mines might bring new opportunities for employment has a clear presence, proponents of mining also associate the mines with different ways of taking responsibility for the future, on a local but also on a global scale.

I follow the ‘mining as development imperative’ with a discussion on how development is framed in alternative ways in Storuman, where the mining projects become detrimental to development.

After establishing the multiple ways that people construct development, I summarise by showing how these constructions, which can appear to be irreconcilable at times, create connections between positions.

6.3.1 Mining as Development in Storuman

In the mainstream political discourse in Sweden, extractive projects are seen as protecting peripheral areas from stagnation through the development of new infrastructure, local industries, and employment opportunities (Busch *et al.* 2023). Also for local actors, a mine opening can become associated with strong visions of a better future, strengthening the link between ‘development’ and mining to the point that mining *becomes* development (c.f., Poelzer & Ejdemo 2018). In paper II and III, I show how mining in Storuman is connected to ideas of development mainly through the belief that the mining projects will generate employment opportunities that will help the local labour market and might lead to new people moving to the municipality, which is a recurring theme among proponents of mining in rural Sweden (Haikola & Anshelm 2016; Haikola & Anshelm 2018; Lindahl *et al.* 2018).

Advocates of this position could be found among landowners, villagers, and not least in the political leadership. The leadership of the municipal government in Storuman held a positive position on the mining projects, and in interviews and news reports they described them as potential benefactors.

In fact, the municipal leadership, headed by its chairman and head of the Centre Party, took actions such as writing a letter of appeal against a project that had its permits revoked and produced magazines and surveys of the potential for ‘economic growth and sustainable development’ that the mining projects would bring (Duvdahl 2012; Lindahl *et al.* 2016b).

For mining supporters in Storuman, the potential mines were seen as protecting the *glesbygd* from stagnation. For them, a mine opening was associated with strong visions of a better future, strengthening the link between ‘development’ and mining to the point that mining became development, as I show in paper II. However, this link between development and mining went beyond the economic benefits, and as the potential mines also became associated with the green transition.

In June 2019, I travelled to a village close to the Kyrkberget project, where I was invited into the kitchen of local politician Sven, who argued that both the local and the global aspects of development were connected through the mining projects. Living next to a planned mine, Sven explained that there was no real path forward for the municipality if it did not take the potential investment opportunities that the mining projects represented seriously. Sven talked about employment opportunities and growth, but also raised another issue that I found among both sceptics and supporters of the potential mines. This was the issue of taking responsibility for the extraction of minerals. Sven expressed that if you use a certain mineral, you also need to take responsibility for its extraction even if it means accepting hazardous mining projects in your vicinity. And this, according to him, is twice as true in the time of the green transition, when minerals needed to mitigate climate change through the construction of ‘green technology’ exacerbates mineral extraction across the globe.

At first glance, it would seem as if the municipality was all in favour of mining, but the pro-mining stance was underpinned by ambiguous feelings in the municipality. In stark contrast stood the vocal Left Party, which has positioned itself as emphatically opposed to mines, and particularly the proposed mine in Rönnbäcken. Among the other parties, the issue of mining seems to be much less discussed, but in the interviews with politicians of the Left Party, the theme of an extractivist relationship between the *glesbygd* and ‘the state’ began to crystalise.

For people in Storuman, regardless of their position vis à vis the mining, the potential mines were seen as contingent with top-down structures and

policies where development is an external force coming into a place and pushing people to react. The mines are both welcomed, or even encouraged, and seen as threats. They are understood in terms of economic development, sacrifice, and as expressions of colonialism (paper II & III). Concerns regarding the potential (not to say the inescapable) environmental impacts of the mines are mixed with a feeling of being exploited by the state, common across all positions, even among those in favour of the projects. For proponents of the potential mines, accepting the mines are seen as a reasonable sacrifice for development (see paper II). However, this acceptance can also be understood as a response to the limitations of a development discourse, where the solution to the challenges that the *glesbygd* is facing is reduced to a lack of employment opportunities.

At the same time, with advent of the green transition narrative by Swedish state agencies and its attachment to the idea that mining is development as Arora-Jonsson and McAreavey (2023) point to, the *glesbygd* is now transforming from a space of crisis into a site where the pursuit of a sustainable future is believed to unfold. This creates a powerful imperative for a certain kind of development, which centres on ‘green’ industrial investments. However, as I show in the next section, alternative ideas of development can be identified in Storuman, ideas that can help us reconceptualise development from the bottom up.

6.3.2 Rethinking Development: How We Want to Live

In my meeting with Sven, he brought up the argument of taking responsibility for the extraction of minerals (see also paper I, II and IV). When I brought up this position to Anni, the Sami woman in Björkvattnet, she countered that the argument that we need to take responsibility was a bad one in many ways. For one, she argued, a new mine here would not mean less mines somewhere else. If it becomes profitable to start the project in Rönnbäcken, this would encourage other projects across the globe, where the cost of labour is lower. Secondly, it moved the matter of responsibility to individuals in the hope of creating a bad conscience, rather than asking questions about how we use our resources and relate to our environment. In her response, she flipped the notion of responsibility, and instead poses the question of taking responsibility for a future where we live closer to our environment. Furthermore, she questioned what development was and could

be, moving beyond the mining-is-development-narrative by arguing for a future where indigenous livelihoods and culture was a driving force.

During another interview with Jenny, a middle-aged woman who worked in Tärnaby, she reflected on the mines and how they stood for a particular development discourse.

This enormous impact on the environment but at what costs, to what benefits? I feel it is impossible to fathom. And how greedy we are as humans. It raises existential questions, it is not just about me but about the global world we find ourselves in. How should we think, not only here but in a larger perspective regarding our natural resources. How should we think about these matters? And our whole way of life? These are questions that we need to address. And there are no quick answers, but I think it is important that we ask ourselves these hard questions. (Jenny, Tärnaby, 2018)

Paper I, III, and IV show how people attempt to answer the questions that Jenny asks us. Anni, (in section 6.1.3), suggests that the mining projects are examples of green-washed colonialism, and that they are detrimental to an indigenous way of life in Björkvattnet (see also Persson & Öhman 2014). The presence of the projects cannot be reduced to a conflict of competing interests but must instead be understood in terms of existence for the people affected (c.f., Åhren & Lawrence 2017). For Anni, one pathway to development would be embracing Sami culture, ranging from language revival to a progressive focus on Sami livelihoods. Other Sami people living in Björkvattnet expressed similar sentiments.

During one of these interviews, I met Oskar, a young man from Tärnamo. He argued that while he would move his family if the mines became a reality, he refuted the notion that development should be thought of in terms of growth based on more resource extraction, but rather would come from the pursuit of a more minimalistic lifestyle.

Both Anni and Oskar draw on an indigenous past to motivate their arguments, and in so doing point to a need for decolonising development and what it means in the Björkvattnet valley (see paper III and IV). This connects them to a larger struggle for indigenous rights that takes place across the globe. A concrete example of this can be found in how Vapsten RHA engaged with the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) which ruled that the Rönnbäcken project was a

violation of Sami property rights (see paper I and IV). This shows both that what unfolds in Storuman around the mining projects is contingent on what happens on an international scale, but also that people actively draw on networks that reach across scales to shape outcomes on the ground.

In the many interviews carried out in Storuman and Barsele the interviewees contrasted the development through mining narrative, not by arguing for a different way of life, but for a more just division of the profits made from what they saw as the current extractivist enterprises, such as hydropower. Even in these interviews, a theme of colonialism emerged. In these cases, colonialism was understood in terms of national politics that gave external actors the right to natural resources, while giving people in Storuman little to no rights to their own environment.

The stories above stand in contrast to the idea that mining brings development and give context to the places where the otherwise abstract idea of ‘green transition’ is thought to be realised. In the concluding chapter, I show that while the idea of mining as development and mining as a threat to development are irreconcilable, there are still connections between these positions.

7. Conclusion

At the heart of the responses to the potential mines there seems to be a shared desire for an assurance of continuity, where important aspects of rural life, such as living close to nature, remain intact (c.f., Bergelin *et al.* 2008; Landström 2023). People in Storuman formulate different narratives about what development is and should be, and while some do welcome the potential mines with open arms, this is not the dominant position. Instead, the mines are seen as the outcome of a national resource politics that has shaped life in the *glesbygd* for a long time (c.f., Keskitalo *et al.* 2019; Sörlin 2019; Sörlin 2023). In local visions of development there are clear challenges to this trajectory, and rather than optimistically seeing the ‘green transition’ as progressive development, it is understood in terms of business as usual, a process where history is repeating itself. From these local perspectives it seems clear that ‘The Land of the Future’, so central to the imaginary of progressive development, does not include the actual places that provide the basis of this future.

The mining projects represent something new for the people in Storuman. They are, as I have shown, generative of what I see as an open moment, where a state of uncertainty becomes a central part of life. The open moment can be used as a heuristic device that both reveals established structures of territorial relations while at the same time shows how these can be renegotiated and change during the turbulence that people experience in the open moment. Rather than being passive receivers of state policies, this research makes apparent how people can take charge of their situation in open moments, albeit in different and sometimes contradictory ways.

Just as I have shown the entrenched positions of proponents and opponents of mining, I have also shown how responses to the mining projects are surrounded by ambiguity. While the many nuances to the positions that

people take up are important there is also something to say regarding what connects them. I have shown how, regardless of position, there is an overarching critique of how state policies and practices treat communities at the edge of the state. The core of this critique lies at the intersection of past and future, as people make sense of what unfolds in the open moment both as the latest instantiation of repression in a long history of colonial practices, and as a desire to reevaluate what development is and can be.

I have placed myself at the intersection where top-down narratives of development and grand visions of green technological transitions meet with local narratives of development and constructions of the rural. This points towards a need to bring the discussion of what development entails closer to the ground. I show that through the narrative of ‘green transition’ rural areas are becoming understood as sites where the good, green, and modern future can be created (c.f., Arora-Jonsson & McAreavey 2023). In light of this transformation, we need to take stock and bring ‘the local’ into the discussion, lest we reproduce past injustices. That being said, in such an endeavour it is important to remember that ‘the local’ is not bereft of intersecting power structures that shape social relations along the lines of gender, level of education, class, and ethnicity. This means that discourses of development will also be shaped by these subjectivities and must be addressed accordingly.

As I close this thesis, there are things that I want to highlight. Firstly, while literature on resource extraction and indigenous research often overlap, it is seldom understood as research on rural development. In the Global North, natural resource extraction and indigenous lives are intrinsically linked to rural areas, as research has shown. (Arora-Jonsson 2019; Raitio *et al.* 2020; Österlin & Raitio 2020; Arora-Jonsson *et al.* 2023) These rural areas are the spaces where struggles over rights and access to land take place (Bay-Larsen *et al.* 2018; Dale *et al.* 2018; Arora-Jonsson & McAreavey 2023; Mahon *et al.* 2023). To understand how the ‘green transition’ impacts rural areas and what the future for rural development studies entails, these literatures must be in continued conversation with each other. Secondly, while we live in a time where a great transition of our society is indeed needed, we must not let a bright green future be built on a foundation of past and present injustices.

8. Summary of the Papers

8.1 Paper 1: Territorial Narratives: Talking Claims in Open Moments

In the rural inland of Northern Sweden, three mining projects are making the future of the land uncertain. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, we show how these potential mining interventions create ‘open moments’, turbulent events that destabilise established claims to land. We analyse how actors such as reindeer herders, indigenous groups, local and national government, and mining companies make claims to land, (i.e. territorialising it) by drawing on discourses on environmental responsibility, sustainability, indigeneity, or growth. By paying attention to language and knowledge production, we show how a multiplicity of actors narrate territory into being, allowing us to go beyond conventional notions of territory as produced ‘from above’ by the state or by counter-territorial movements ‘from below’. By ‘freezing time’ in the unfolding of the open moments we lend all these ‘territorial narratives’ equal space, in order to analyse the connection between actors and their relation to land. This allows us to show connections between what might otherwise be perceived as locked and antagonistic positions, but also how ongoing processes of territorialisation are influenced by and change people’s subject positions as the open moment unfolds on the ground.

8.2 Paper 2: Sustainable Development and Sacrifice in the Rural North

In this paper, I examine how the grand narratives of sustainability, development, and mining impact local governance in a Swedish municipality. I do this by studying three mining projects under implementation and relate them to notions of development and sacrifice to lend insights into what the new trends of mining in Europe outlined above mean for the rural North. I regard sustainable development as a political concept ascribed to activities (such as political programs or investments). Based on ethnographic fieldwork in Storuman municipality I show how politicians, political parties, and government administrators position themselves in relation to the three mining projects. I provide a detailed account of perceptions, responses, and practices in a local government that engages with three mining companies seeking to open mines within the municipal borders. I show how a tug of war between ideas of sustainable development or survival through sacrifice depoliticises and stabilises a dominant political line in favour of mining within local politics. While the respondents differed in what they thought that sacrifice might lead to, ranging from environmental disaster and social suffering to economic prosperity, I reveal a process wherein sustainable development becomes translated into ‘that which must be sacrificed’.

8.3 Paper 3: The Green Mining Imperative and Multiple Meanings of Development in Rural Northern Sweden

The historical track record of the mining industry is poor. Yet, mining industry is increasingly using terms like sustainability and energy transition to produce the minerals needed for ‘green technologies’ believed to be a model for development and a solution to the climate crisis. In Swedish state policies, mining has long been associated with economic growth and seen as an engine for regional development. I show that these two narratives form an imperative where the opening of new mines solves challenges that rural communities are facing, while contributing to a ‘greener’ future by supporting green technologies. Yet, this imperative is not left unchallenged by people living in the areas targeted by mining investments. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in Northern Sweden, I see development as a set of ideas and practices that seek to improve communities. I focus on how the narratives encountered on the ground sometimes diverge, overlap, and reveal

the limits of state thinking on development. I identify three ways that alternative development pathways emerge. First, I show how people engage with problems with present political practices. Secondly, I focus on everyday acts of resistance where people subvert state practices and policies, thereby showing the limits of state thinking on development and governance. Finally, I highlight ways of being in the world that do not regard nature as a set of resources ready to be utilised. In sum, the three alternative development pathways challenge the ‘mining as development and sustainability’ imperative, to open questions of what sustainable development is and can be.

8.4 Paper 4: Towards a Green Transition: A Post- and De-colonial Analysis of the Green State of Sweden

This chapter is a post/decolonial analysis of the racial underpinnings of the Swedish state’s relationship to nature and its ongoing attempts at bringing about a green transition (i.e., the development of infrastructure and technologies that will ensure a zero-carbon emission future). Belief in being at the forefront of environmental efforts have been central to Sweden’s self-image as a nation in recent decades, an image that is emphasised and mobilised both in the political discourse that frames the green transition and in de facto claims on indigenous lands in Northern Sweden. We show how an expansion of the post/decolonial analytical frame is crucial not only for an understanding of how colonial thinking has shaped environmental governance in the West in the past, but in fact continues to shape domestic environmental politics and democracy in Sweden.

Based on ethnographic field work and analysis of news editorials and government websites we move between a national and a local level to show how the ‘environmental state’ is anchored in colonial scientific thought wherein nature is reduced to a set of resources ready for utilisation. We focus on the stories of how this self-worlding expresses itself among policy makers and bureaucrats on the ground. We point to how development and democracy is identified and given a certain meaning, how personal and national identities are created, and how the ‘rest of the world’ is being defined for a Swedish audience – and how all this is used to shape an environmental practice at home, essential for the environmentalist ‘green state.’ Our analysis shows that the notion of a ‘green state’ is built on gendered, urban-

rural, global as well as local ethnoracial inequalities that privilege technologies and undermine indigenous lives and rural landscapes.

Importantly, we give voice to the dissonances within dominant national narratives. Such dissonant voices, we surmise, are needed to confront the environmental and democratic crises we face today. The questions of indigenous rights, inequalities between the urban and rural, and between countries in the Global North and the Global South, reveal cracks in the façade of the grand narrative of the green state. These questions are not merely vestiges of a colonial past, but in fact questions for and about the present.

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Popular Science Summary

This thesis in rural development centers on mining interventions in the rural North of Sweden. In recent years, mining has increasingly been part of the political discussion in Sweden and beyond. In part, this is an outcome of what has been referred to as the ‘green transition’. Key in this transition is the development of ‘green technology’ such as electric vehicles and renewable energy systems. Research has shown that the ‘green transition’ increases the demand for certain metals. This has unique consequences for development in rural areas, as these are the places where most of the mineral extraction takes place. Therefore, it is probable that we will see an increase in pressure on rural lands, in the wake of the ‘green transition’. Taking this as a starting point, the aim of the thesis is to explore how mining shapes rural places in times of transition. I ask questions about the entanglements between people and land, the reconfigurations of territory, and what large scale extractive interventions mean for the conceptualisation of rural development in Sweden and beyond. To understand how the ‘green transition’ impacts rural areas and what the future for rural development entails, I bring together research on resource extraction, rural development, and indigeneity.

The research is based on a case study in Storuman, a sparsely populated municipality in the North of Sweden. Using interviews and participant observations, I study what unfolds around three potential and two abandoned mines.

The three mining projects have yet to become operational mines and therefore exist in a state of potentiality, that is, through company plans and resource estimation studies, through permits that contain legal claims to land, as assets held by investors on the stock market, through the mobilisation of anti-mining movements, in discussions over coffee in people’s homes, in national policy pronouncements as well as in local government strategies.

While highly uncertain and still to take physical shape on the ground, the potential mines are tangible enough for people to refer to them as ‘mines’. I show how the potential mines are generative of what I call ‘open moments’, where a state of uncertainty becomes a central part of life. I argue that the open moment can be used as tool to understand how relations to land changes in the presence of large scale natural resource interventions.

The responses to the mining projects are varying. Some people regard the mines as potential engines for economic development, while others see them as existential threats. However, as I go on to show, at the heart of the responses to the potential mines there seems to be a shared desire for an assurance of continuity, where important aspects of rural life, such as living close to nature, remain intact. People in Storuman create narratives about what development is and should be, and while some do welcome the potential mines with open arms, this is not the dominant position. Instead, the mines are seen as the outcome of a national resource politics that has shaped life in rural areas in Sweden for a long time. In local visions of development there are clear challenges to this politics and rather than optimistically seeing the ‘green transition’ as something progressive, it is understood in terms of business as usual, a process where a colonial history is repeating itself.

I argue that there is an overarching critique of how state policies and practices treat communities at the edge of the state. The research points towards a need to bring the discussion of what development entails closer to the ground, especially in relation to land use. I show that through the narrative of ‘green transition’ rural areas are becoming understood as sites where the good, green, and modern future can be created. In light of this transformation, we need to take stock and bring ‘the local’ into the discussion, lest we reproduce past injustices.

Populärvetenskaplig sammanfattning

I denna avhandling i landsbygdsutveckling studerar jag gruvetableringar i norra Sverige. Under de senaste åren har gruvor och gruvdrift blivit centralt i den politiska diskursen i Sverige men även utomlands. Detta är delvis en effekt av det som ofta kallas för ”den gröna omställningen”. Centralt i denna omställning är utvecklingen av så kallad grön teknologi, såsom eldrivna fordon eller fossilfria energisystem. Detta får särskilda konsekvenser för landsbygden, då denna utgörs av de platser där gruvbrytning sker. Det är därför troligt att vi kommer se ett ökat tryck på landsbygden, som följd av den gröna omställningen. Med detta som utgångspunkt är denna avhandlings syfte att utforska hur potentiell gruvdrift formar landsbygder i tider av omställning. Utifrån detta syfte ställer jag frågor om sammanflätningarna mellan människor och mark, territoriala förändringar och vad storskaliga utvinningsprojekt betyder för landsbygdsutveckling både i och bortom Sverige. För att förstå hur ”den gröna omställningen” påverkar landsbygden för jag samman forskning som behandlar naturresursutvinning, landsbygdsutveckling och urfolksstudier.

Forskningen är grundad i en fallstudie i Storuman, en glesbefolkad kommun i norra Sverige. Genom att använda mig av intervjuer och deltagande observationer, studerar jag vad som händer kring tre potentiella och två övergivna gruvor. De tre möjliga gruvorna, eller gruvprojekten, har ännu inte realiserats, utan existerar under en form av potentialitet. De kan ses i gruv- och prospekteringsbolagens rapporter, genom tillstånd som ger vissa rättigheter till marken, i aktieägares portföljer och genom gruvmotståndares mobilisering, vid kaffeborden i byarna och i kommunala plandokument. Även om de omfattas av mycket osäkerhet, så är gruvprojekten tillräckligt substantiella för att benämnas som gruvor, i uttalanden såsom ”om gruvan kommer”. Jag visar hur dessa potentiella gruvor bidrar till vad jag kallar för

”öppningar” (*open moments*), perioder där osäkerhet och oklarhet blir en central del av livet. Jag visar hur dessa öppningar får konsekvenser i människors vardag och omformar relationen till marken.

Gruvorna ger upphov till en mängd varierande reaktioner. Vissa ser dem som potentiella motorer för lokal ekonomisk utveckling, med andra betraktar dem som existentiella hot. Trots detta så sammanlänkas svaren i en önskan om ett fortsatt liv på platsen. Människor i Storuman formulerar narrativ kring vad utveckling är och kan vara, och även om vissa välkomnar gruvorna med öppna armar så är detta inte den dominanta positionen. Istället betraktas gruvorna som en effekt av en kolonial naturresursförvaltningspolitik som har format Sverige och inte minst Norrland under en lång tid. I platsbaserade visioner om utveckling, så utmanar människorna i Storuman denna politik och istället för att betrakta den ”gröna omställningen” som något progressivt, så förstås den i termer av att en historia av övergrepp och förtryck upprepas.

Jag argumenterar för att det finns en sammankopplande kritik av hur statliga policys och praktiker hanterar glesbygdssamhällen. Forskningen pekar på att det finns ett behov av att föra samtalet om vad utveckling innebär närmare människorna som påverkas av naturresursprojekten. Jag visar att genom idén om den ”gröna omställningen” blir landsbygden betraktad som en plats där den goda, gröna och moderna framtiden kan skapas. I ljuset av detta måste vi stanna upp och fråga oss vad som händer med de platser där denna idé ska realiseras, och plocka upp det lokala perspektivet, så att vi inte reproducerar historiska orättvisor.

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To my darling Ivar and Tuva: The stupid book is done, and we can go out and play.

Finally, Emma, thank you for the life you give me. I love you.

Appendix

Table X: Xxxxxxx.

Informant	Affiliation	Territorial scope	Number of interviews	Age	Gender	Highest degree of education	Self-identified as	Time of interview	Joint	Position re. mines
1	Storuman Municipality	Municipality	2	43	m	PhD	Swe	18 Apr, 19 Feb.	y/n	ambiguous
2	Björkvattdalen	Landowner	1	31	m	Vocational	Sami/Swe	18 Apr.	n	anti
3	Tärna-Stensele Forest commons	Forest management	1	59	m	Uni.	Swe	18 Apr.	n	pro
4	Björkvattdalen	Vapsten	1	m	m	Uni.	Sami	20 Mar.	n	anti
5	Abborrberg	Homeowner	1	69	f	High school	Sami/Swe	18 Apr.	y	anti
6	Storuman Municipality	Municipality	1	m	m	Uni.	Swe	20 Mar.	Y	?
7	Storuman	Homeowner	1	81	m	Uni.	Swe	20 Feb.	n	ambiguous
8	Kyrkberg	Landowner	1	81	m	Uni.	Swe	18 Apr.	n	pro
9	Björkvattdalen	Landowner	1	77	m	?	Sami	18 Apr.	y	anti
10	Kyrkberg	Homeowner	1	62	f	Uni.	Swe	19 Jun.	y	anti
11	Storuman Municipality	Municipality	1	42	f	Uni.	Swe	19 Jun.	n	ambiguous
12	Strömsund	Vapsten	1	55	m	Uni.	Swe	20 Mar.	n	ambiguous
13	Gumarn	Landowner	2	68	m	Uni.	Swe	18 Apr, 19 Jun.	y/n	ambiguous
14	Storuman Municipality (pol)	Homeowner	1	36	m	Uni.	Sami	19 Jun.	n	anti
15	Storuman	Homeowner	1	37	m	Vocational	Swe/Sami	19 Feb.	n	ambiguous
16	Barsele	Landowner	1	78	m	Vocational	Swe	19 Feb.	n	anti
17	Storuman Municipality	Homeowner	1	35	f	Uni.	Swe	18 Apr.	y	ambiguous
18	Barsele	Homeowner	1	38	f	Uni.	Swe	19 Jun.	y	ambiguous

Informant	Affiliation	Territorial scope	Number of interviews	Age	Gender	Highest degree of education	Self-identified as	Time of interview	Joint	Position re. mines
19	Björkvattdalen	Landowner	1	?	m	Vocational	Swe	18 Apr.	y	pro
20	Skarvsjöby	Homeowner	1	64	m	Vocational	Swe	19 Feb.	n	ambiguous
21	Blaiken	Landowner	1	68	f		Swe	20 Mar.	y	ambiguous
22	Barsele	Homeowner	1	40	m	Vocational	Swe	19 Jun.	y	ambiguous
23	Norrböck	Landowner	1	81	m	Uni.	Swe	19 Feb.	n	anti
24	Tärnaby	Homeowner	1	53	f	Vocational	Swe	18 Apr.	n	anti
25	Sami parliament	Sápmi	1	59	m	Uni.	Sami	18 Apr.	n	ambiguous
26	Kyrkberg	Landowner/ Municipality	1	61	m	Vocational	Swe	19 Jun.	n	pro
27	Tärnaby	Ubmeje	1		m	Uni.	Sami	20 Mar.	n	anti
28	Kyrkberg	Homeowner	1	62	f	?	Swe	19 Jun.	y	ambiguous
29	Kyrkberg	Landowner	1	16	m	High school	Swe	19 Feb.	y	ambiguous
30	Blaiken	Landowner	1	79	m	Uni.	Swe	20 Mar.	Y	ambiguous
31	Barsele	Landowner	1	65	m	?	Swe	19 Jun.	n	ambiguous
32	Storuman Municipality	Municipality	2	33	m	Uni.	Swe	18 Apr, 19 Feb.	y/n	ambiguous
33	Gunnarn	Homeowner	1	44	m	Uni.	Swe	19 Feb.	n	anti
34	Storuman Municipality (pol)	Municipality	1	63	f	Vocational	Swe	19 Feb.	n	ambiguous
35	Storuman Municipality (pol)	Municipality	1	58	f	Uni.	Swe	19 Feb.	n	anti
36	Blaiken	Landowner	1	28	f	Vocational	Swe	20 Mar.	n	ambiguous
37	AE	Barsele Mining Project	1	50	m	Uni.	Fin	19 Feb.	y/n	pro

Informant	Affiliation	Territorial scope	Number of interviews	Age	Gender	Highest degree of education	Self-identified as	Time of interview	Joint	Position re. mines
38	Stensele	Landowner	1	85 m	m	Vocational	Swe	19 Feb.	n	ambiguous
39	Barsele	Homeowner	1	61 m	m	Uni.	Swe	19 Jun.	n	ambiguous
40	Storuman	Homeowner	1	85 f	f	Uni.	Swe		n	anti
41	Gunnarn	Landowner	1	69 m	m	Uni.	Swe	19 Jun.	n	anti
42	AE	Barsele Mining Project	1	?	f	Uni.	Can	19 Feb.	y	pro
43	Gunnarn	Homeowner	1	48 f	f	Uni.	Swe	19 Jun.	y	anti
44	Björkvattdalen	Vapsten	1	42 f	f	Uni.	Sami	19 Jun.	n	anti
45	Storuman Municipality (pol)	Municipality	1	69 f	f	Vocational	Swe	20 Mar.	n	pro
46	Storuman Municipality	Municipality	1	f		Uni.	Swe	20 Mar.	Y	?
47	Storuman	Homeowner	1	46 m	m	Uni.	Sami/Swe	18 Apr.	y	anti
48	Storuman	?	1	50 f	f	Vocational	Swe	19 Feb.	y	pro
49	Gardiken	Sápmi	1	51 m	m	Uni.	Sami	19 Feb.	n	anti
50	Storuman Municipality (pol)	Homeowner	1	76 m	m	Uni.	Swe	19 Jun.	n	pro
51	Strömsund	Landowner	1	55 m	m	Uni.	Swe	20 Mar.	n	ambiguous
52	Barsele	Homeowner	2	63 f	f	?	Swe	18 Apr.	y	ambiguous
53	Kyrkberg	Homeowner	1	34 f	f	Uni.	Swe	19 Jun.	y	ambiguous
54	Barsele	Homeowner	1	68 m	m	Vocational	Swe	18 Apr.	y	anti
55	Gunnarn	Landowner	1	55 f	f	Uni.	Swe	18 Apr.	n	ambiguous
56	Storuman Municipality	Homeowner	2	65 m	m	Uni.	Swe	18 Apr, 19 Feb.	y/n	anti

Informant	Affiliation	Territorial scope	Number of interviews	Age	Gender	Highest degree of education	Self-identified as	Time of interview	Joint	Position re. mines
57	Storuman Municipality (pol)	Homeowner	1	61 m	Vocational	Swe	20 Mar.	n	ambiguous	
58	AE	Homeowner	1	? m	Uni.	Chz	19 Feb.	y	pro	
59	Björkvattsdalen	Homeowner	1	66 f	?	Ger	18 Apr.	y	anti	
60	Vapsteen Stije	Vapsten	2	74 f	Uni.	Sami	18 Apr, 19 Feb.	n	anti	
61	Umnäs	Landowner	1	85 m	Uni.	Swe	18 Apr.	n	ambiguous	
62	Gunnarn	Landowner	1	72 m	Vocational	Swe	19 Feb.	y	anti	
63	Bäckmark									
64	Barsele	Landowner	1	40 f	Uni.	Swe	19 Jun.	n	anti	
65	Storuman Municipality (pol)	Municipality	2	50 m	Vocational	Swe	18 Apr, 19 Feb.	n	pro	
66	Björkvattsdalen	Landowner	1	18 m	High school	Swe	19 Feb.	y	ambiguous	
67	Barsele	Homeowner	1	38 f	Uni.	Swe	19 Jun.	n	ambiguous	
68	Gunnarn	Homeowner	1	48 m	Vocational	Swe	19 Jun.	y/n	ambiguous	
69	Tärnaby	Municipality	1	53 m	Uni.	Swe	20 Mar.	n	ambiguous	
70	Björkvattsdalen	Landowner	1	66 m	Vocational	Swe	18 Apr.	y	pro	
71	SNF	Municipality	1	72 m	Uni.	Swe	19 Jun.	n	anti	
72	Björkvattsdalen	Vapsten	1	40 m	Uni.	Swe	18 Apr.	n	anti	
73	Storuman Municipality (pol)	?	1	48 f	Uni.	Sami	20 Feb.	n	ambiguous	
74	Gunnarn	Landowner	1	68 f	?	Swe	18 Apr.	y	ambiguous	



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Territorial narratives: Talking claims in open moments

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ABSTRACT

In the rural inland of northern Sweden, three mining projects are making the future of the land uncertain. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, we show how these potential mining interventions create 'open moments', turbulent events that destabilizes established claims to land. We analyse how actors such as reindeer herders, indigenous groups, local and national government and mining companies make claims to land, (i.e. territorialising it) by drawing on discourses on environmental responsibility, sustainability, indigeneity or growth. By paying attention to language and knowledge production, we show how a multiplicity of actors narrate territory into being, allowing us to go beyond conventional notions of territory as produced 'from above' by the state or by counter-territorial movements 'from below'. By 'freezing time' in the unfolding of the open moments we lend all these 'territorial narratives' equal space, in order to analyse the connection between actors and their relation to land. This allow us to show connections between what might otherwise be perceived as locked and antagonistic positions, but also how ongoing processes of territorialisation are influenced by and change peoples' subject positions as the open moment unfolds on the ground.

1. Introduction

In the last two decades, mining companies, both national and international, have exerted increasing pressure on rural and indigenous lands in northern Sweden – a pressure encouraged by the Swedish state (Lawrence and Åhrén, 2016). The government's desire to utilise forests, rivers and minerals in northern Sweden includes Sápmi,¹ the traditional homeland of the indigenous Sami people. These claims to land, which often impinge on local livelihoods, have created an institutional and material landscape of complex 'legal pluralism' of sometimes competing 'normative systems' (Tamanaha, 2008). Normative systems may be formal such as state legislation, rules that govern the global mining industry or environmental prescriptions or customary such as indigenous rights or local norms that regulate access to land. In studies of three mining projects in Storuman municipality in northern Sweden, we show how a potential mining intervention creates an 'open moment' (Lund, 2016) that brings to the surface competing claims to land as actors draw on different but also overlapping normative systems to reconfigure territory and relations to land.

Building on, but also going beyond Lund's 'open moment' that he regards as being brought about by a rupture in existing relations of

power, we analyse what may take place in an open moment and the possible trajectories that can open up. We show how an open moment provides an opportunity to influence the future of land use, as it creates a space where actors can narrate territories into being. The narrators wedge themselves into the opening created by the mining project and mobilise narratives that draw on normative systems underpinned by discourses on environmental responsibility, sustainability, indigeneity or growth in order to 'territorialise' land. In particular, we show how a deeper analysis of such a moment in time reveals not only underlying structures and relations to land but importantly, throws light on how past colonial ruptures and present territorial injustices may be renegotiated and more equitable futures forged.

By focussing on people's narratives in ongoing events, we analyse the constant making of territory that underpins daily life in open moments. We reveal how narratives – both big (and powerful) and small (less heard but nevertheless persistent) order everyday life and relations to land. In our analysis of the narratives in the open moment, we 'freeze time' (Arora-Jonsson, 2013:11) that is, we accord all narratives equal space, scrutinising narratives that reveal people's relations to each other and the land in that moment.

Our focus on narratives as intrinsic to territorial processes allows us

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¹ The Swedish part of Sápmi includes almost one third of the nation's landmass and contain the Sami reindeer pastures. Sápmi also includes territories in Norway, Finland and the Kola peninsula

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to bring insights to how stories of belonging and marginality (Ween and Lien, 2017; Arora-Jonsson, 2013) are as important in territorialising land as narratives about mining regions and economic growth (Vela-Almeida, 2018). We show how narrators' identities, along the lines of gender, class, education, ethnicity or 'place belongingness' (Antonsich, 2010), structure an open moment, but also how their subject positions may even change in an open moment.

Thus, by elaborating on this narrative approach to territory, we strengthen and deepen thinking on the making of territory in two important ways. Firstly, through our attention to narratives that surface in an open moment, we bring attention to a multiplicity of territorialisers, both dominant actors such as the state but also the less visible territorial processes involving peoples' every-day lives and their relation to land and place. We argue for an approach that goes beyond a state-centric 'from above' or counter/re-territorializing 'from below' approaches to the production of territory that opens up novel insights into how territory is produced and layered. Secondly, attention to a multiplicity of narratives bring insights into how narratives can intersect and cut across differences of what otherwise seem like entrenched and antagonistic positions among actors. Thus, we argue that rather than defining their positions for or against the mines, such an approach helps us identify new openings and relations across what might appear to be irreconcilable differences.

In the following section, positioning ourselves at the intersection of work on territory and narratives, we discuss the literature that enables us to analyse how territory is narrated into being. Next, we describe our methodology, followed by a history of land-use in Storuman. We go on to discuss the open moment in Storuman created by the potential mines and show how narratives - such as that of Swedish rural areas as the rightful place for 'sustainable mining' (c.f. Kirsch, 2014), of marginalisation and belonging (c.f. Arora-Jonsson, 2013) or a narrative of responsibility to place and environment cut across differences between actors.

2. Narrating territory in open moments

Research on mining in the Arctic and Sweden makes it clear that a mine heralds a future where land is drastically and irrevocably transformed and property and usufruct rights reconfigured (see Haddaway et al., 2019; Österlin and Raitio, 2020). In his work on colonialism in Indonesia and Ghana, Lund (2016:102) conceptualises the period of turmoil in property rights and breakdown of governing structures between state authority and the people as a 'rupture.' Drawing on a history of work (e.g. Moore, 2011; Moore, 1987; Das, 1995) that conceptualises how a turbulent event lays bare underlying structures, he uses the term 'open moment' to capture how 'risks and opportunities multiply' during a rupture. In our use of the term, the open moment does not necessarily signify a breakdown of the old and the assembly of new relations between state authority and property rights (Lund, 2016:1202–1203). Rather, we show that there does not have to be a rupture in existing relations, but that the mere notion of a mine and the change it portends can 'open the moment' for action and change. Relations to land are cast in doubt and the possibility of radical change is amplified. It is this space and moment of uncertainty in relations to and use of land and the narrating and remaking of territory that is at the heart of our inquiry.

2.1. Territory, land and property

Geographer David Storey (2012: 27) suggests that territories are bounded spaces, regulated, policed and instilled with meaning by people. Land, Storey explains, is the material part of territory and a key part of its production. Elden (2013:6) argues that territory or the 'relations between place and power' can be understood as a political technology comprised of ways of measuring land (as an economic resource) and controlling terrain (the strategic and political use of land). Territory is not static and is continually produced through spatial strategies by the

state that affect, influence and control resources and people in a bounded space (Storey, 2012; Painter, 2010; Cox, 2002). Painter (2010) draws attention to how state 'territorialisation' is carried out by a network of human and non-human actors (e.g. policy texts, public infrastructure or surveillance technology) in mundane every-day actions of government authorities. These include maintaining public infrastructure, tax-collection, creating surveys of the population or as we go on to show in our case, through granting concessions to mining companies.

Property is important in relation to territory due to its legal authority. Property as a social relation that infers an enforceable claim to land, can be said to be realised through territorialisation (Blomley, 2016:225). Extrapolating from Blomley's accounts, property rights may be seen as enforceable rights to territory as they are normally enforced through actions informed by state or customary law. While we analyse how state territorialisation takes place through mining interventions, we also turn to work such as that of historian and legal scholar, Rose (1994) who shows how community norms are central in shaping property regimes.² Narratives are crucial in establishing these norms. Rose shows how property rights are in fact dependent on the ability of an actor to persuade others that such rights exist. For example, Peluso (2005) describes how non-governmental organisations in Indonesia mapped and documented customary property regimes where the government claimed that no prior property relations existed and contributed to changing the outcome of state territoriality. Rather than usurping state authority, this was, in fact, an appeal to the state to include local territorial configurations in state territorialisation.

We draw on Blomley's link between territory and property and insights on how narratives can shape property relations (c.f. Rose 1994; Fortmann, 1995) to analyse territorialisation not only as a state prerogative but also to analyse the making of territory and reinforcing property through narratives in the everyday.

2.2. Knowledge production

Territory is contingent on knowledge production. As ways of measuring and controlling land (e.g. moving from hand drawn political maps to GIS) change over time, so does our notion of territory (Elden, 2013). Scholars have shown how state agencies at various levels produce territory (e.g. Painter, 2010; Vandergest and Peluso, 1995). For example, Vela Almeida (2018) demonstrate this in the production of 'mining territories' by the 'post-neoliberal state' in Ecuador where space was territorialised through government practices that naturalised mining activities on the ground in Cordillera del Condor region.

Knowledge production also takes place in policies. Policies too are narratives that address certain issues and tend to be characterised by an opening (where the problem is stated), a middle (where the policy addresses the issue) and an end (where the policy has solved the issue) (Roe, 1994: 37). Roe demonstrates how policy narratives are persistent, even in the face of empirical evidence that suggests that the policy might be misguided. Reminding us that policies have important implications for the ways in which political subjects think of themselves, Arora-Jonsson (2018) draws attention to how policies in the global North may be framed in relation to problems of the 'less developed' global South, not only to showcase their development and policy success but to justify (non-)interventions at home. We go on to build on such a relational analysis across the global North and South, to show how a narrative of Northern responsibility for mining is presented as the sustainable solution for the future. We study how by presenting both a problem and its solution, a policy narrative claims control over a distant future, increasing the narrators' ability to define space (c.f. Ween and Lien, 2017), that is, to territorialise it in the present and the future.

² A property regime is the relationship between individuals, property and the enforcing institution of property rights

Much knowledge production is legitimised by the past. In her work on in Zimbabwe, Fortmann (1995) shows how narratives legitimise claims to property by rooting them in history, reinforcing feelings that the claim is justified. Narratives are used to explain how the past has given shape to the present, as well to present visions about the future, furthering the legitimacy of a claim. We show how narratives are sustained and knowledge produced through the re-telling of local histories (c.f. Sack, 1983) of the land, its multiple uses and shifts in property rights. In their work in Norway and Australia, Ween and Lien (2017) point to how indigenous relations to land and resources are not readily translated into western traditions of law. In Sápmi, the nation states gave preference to legal knowledge about use and claims to land, rendering other ways of being with and 'belonging to land' unimaginable (Ween and Lien, 2017:142), thus privileging one 'normative system' (Tamana, 2008) over others.

Thus, we pay close attention to how knowledge about land and belonging is produced, whether through a recourse to the past, in everyday interactions or in policy, to analyse how different actors produce territory.

2.3. Identity, positionality and territory

Feminists (e.g. McGrellis, 2005; Smith et al., 2016; Wastl-Walter and Staeheli, 2013) have broadened the discussion of territory and its boundaries to include sites and scales beyond the state, demonstrating how the production of territory is intertwined with personal identity and the body. Territory, they argue, is in part produced by the people that occupy and maintain a bounded space, giving form to lines of exclusion or inclusion. Control over bounded space becomes associated with certain identity attributes (e.g. gender or ethnicity) In his review of struggles for territory by indigenous peoples in South America, Halvorsen (2019) emphasises the different ways in which people understand and produce territory by claiming space through cultural practice (e.g. arranging carnivals or marking buildings with graffiti) or by maintaining practices that go against state law (e.g. gathering or hunting on traditional lands turned into state natural reserves). Moving away from western and colonial notions of state territory and rights to territory granted through property rights, Halvorsen, like Elden's (2013:6) notion of practices and ideas between place and power, suggests a definition of territory as "space appropriated for a political project" (Elden's, 2013:5), based on cultural practices.

Building on this insight, we show how indigenous territory is maintained through their narratives and presence/action and how this making of territory is part of producing indigenous identities, crosscut in turn by dimensions of power.

Antonsich (2010) writes that 'place-belongingness,' i.e. personal and emotional connection to a place, are central to a person's identity. In her work in northern Sweden, Arora-Jonsson (2013) shows how belonging was also generated through narratives of having been marginalised by the centre in the nation state, a (gendered) marginalisation that was contested as much as it was elaborated in dialogue with authorities. Here, we go on to analyse how tropes of belonging and marginalisation are central to the making of territory. 'Place-belongingness' highlights how land is connected to peoples' identities and the different ways in which they make claims to territory by living on the land, an aspect that has been explored especially within indigenous research (e.g. Halvorsen, 2019; Ween and Lien, 2017).

In sum, we draw on the literature above to analyse territorialisation not only as a result of state action but also of narratives in the everyday. We go on to study how territory is produced by different actors narrating past stories in relation to land, by producing knowledge in everyday interactions or through policy. In doing so, we draw, especially on feminist work on identity to analyse how territorial projects produce and can change subject positions at the same time as the production of territory is closely intertwined with identity. By putting all three themes presented above, in one frame it is possible to study territory/

territorialisation not only undertaken by the state and as counter territorialisation but to analyse the work of multiplicity of actors and the many intersecting openings among them in the ongoing making of territory.

3. Making territory in Sweden and Sápmi

Rural areas in the north of Sweden may be seen to have been at the centre of two trajectories. One, where the state created the 'glesbygd', the sparsely populated rural areas through policies from the 1950s that privileged the urban over the rural and encouraged a movement to the cities. In mainstream imaginations, urban areas, equated with economic growth and development were seen as the antithesis of the underdeveloped 'glesbygd', with rural inhabitants depicted as those who had been 'left behind' and with few future prospects (Arora-Jonsson, 2013:55-59).

In a parallel trajectory, the Swedish state continued its colonisation of rural territory by transforming or ignoring indigenous rights to land (Brännlund, 2012; Brännström, 2017; Brännström, 2018; Lundmark, 2006). By acknowledging the rights to land only of reindeer herders and not all Sami, state policies sowed discord among Sami groups (Lantto, 2014). That such policies has had lasting repercussions for indigenous land relations among Sami groups is evident in our study sites (Arora-Jonsson, 2019), in Sami policy texts on equality (Pounu et al., 2016) and in debates in the national news media (Renman, 2020).

Sami usufructory rights to land are today mainly enforced through the Reindeer Farming Act (RFA) of 1971, a law that gave shape to the Reindeer Herding Communities (RHC) that are both an economic association of reindeer herders and denote the reindeer pastures (territory) that a RHC governs (Enoksson & Sunesson, 2020). Only about 10% of the Sami population are members of RHCs (Sami information centre website (2021)). Most Sami cannot invoke the RFA to make claims to land, creating a dividing line between reindeer herding and non-reindeer herding Sami (Lantto and Mörkenstam, 2008). This line is intersected by gender. According to the Sami Parliament³ Gender Equality program (Pounu et al., 2016), traditional livelihoods of all Sami have been marred by colonial practices to the point that the Sami livelihoods are constructed as masculine activities and in Sami households, it is often Sami women who are pressured to look for education and employment elsewhere.⁴ Within reindeer herding, both ownership and herding is dominated by men (Enoksson and Sunesson, 2020) and as a result this gives women less voice over decision-making in the RHCs as representation there is based on reindeer ownership (Arora-Jonsson, 2017: 66).

Allard and Brännström (2021) write that a successful route for Swedish Sami to recover lost rights to land is through the Swedish courts. While an important tool for indigenous people to reclaim rights, they acknowledge that it narrows the scope in which land is claimed to legal proceedings. In line with our discussion on knowledge production above, their work shows how a landmark ruling that awarded the Girjas RHC sole hunting and fishing rights to land, was contingent on them producing credible accounts of a history of land use that challenged the history produced by the Swedish state. We go on to study how such processes take shape in our study sites.

4. Methods and material

We carried out ethnographic fieldwork in Storuman municipality in

³ The Sami Parliament is a both a government agency and an electoral body formed by Sami political parties. The Sami Parliament governs matters of Reindeer herding, Sami languages and culture. However, it is a Swedish government institution and its role as a platform for Sami self-determination is limited by state legislation.

⁴ Not unlike farming and forestry more widely in Sweden.

Västerbotten County in northern Sweden in relation to 3 mining projects: a potential gold mine outside the village of Barsele, potential nickel mining in Rönnebäcken and the Kyrkberget project (a fluorspar mine outside the villages of Blaiken and Strömsund). The projects have exclusive rights to ore deposits deemed feasible for large scale extraction.

4.1. Fieldwork

The fieldwork was carried out over a period of 11 weeks (August 2017– March 2020). We conducted 60 interviews with 36 men and 24 women in the villages including civil society members and government officials in Storuman Municipality. The interviewees were between the ages of 16–93 with a median age of 56. Västerbotten County (the main form of land ownership affected by the mines) is male dominated (SCB, 2019). Thirteen interviewees out of 60 identified themselves as indigenous Sami, 2 of whom belonged to a RHC and 3 who practiced reindeer herding. This is of note since due to a history of assimilation, segregation, racism and inter-marriages, identifying as Sami is fluid and not a given. For example, one man had registered himself as a Sami at the Sami parliament in order to be able to vote in the Sami parliament election, but did not consider himself a Sami in any other sense.

We interviewed local inhabitants who had taken a public stand in relation to the mines, participated in resistance networks or spoken up for the opportunities that a mine could provide and also asked them to refer us to others in order to develop our sample of interviewees. To include perspectives from people that in their professional capacity or in their everyday lives might be affected by the mining projects but had not taken up a public position regarding the mines further selection was conducted. Initially we targeted civil servants in local government (whom are prohibited from making public statements) and people active in civil society organisations within the villages and from which we expanded our pool of interviewees through snowball sampling. The research participants can be divided into people who were likely to experience direct impact of the mines (28 men 17 women): villagers, landowners, reindeer herders, indigenous groups, those involved environmental management and societal planning (11 men and 5 women) such as municipal planners, forest managers or those who worked with local governance and development (15 men and 6 women): politicians, association members and those (4 men and 2 women) who represented the mining companies/projects. Sometimes roles overlapped, for e.g. a local politician could also be a landowner. Most interviewees that we were directed to were men since men are predominantly the landowners. We thus made a concerted effort to also talk to women in the communities.

We have given all interviewees fictitious names and all were given the opportunity to react to their portrayal in the text before we submitted the paper. Three interviewees made comments about their portrayal in the text but no one asked to be removed. We have avoided direct quotes when we address issues that we identify as sensitive.

The interviews lasted 1–3 h, were semi-structured, with both general questions and questions designed for that particular research participant (e.g. asking about municipal mining politics with local politicians). The questions aimed to establish a person's background and position in the community (asking them to recount parts of their lives, how they come to live in a particular place, family relations) and to understand how they related to the land: questions about belonging, land use, land rights, affect and economic dimensions. We also asked about their relation to the mining projects, what actions had been taken, how things had changed and how they viewed the future.

We also carried out participant observation in the villages that enabled us to spend time in the landscape and open up for informal conversations about the place. These conversations gave us insights from people whom we otherwise might not have talked to, due to their professed disinterest, frustration or lack of knowledge about the mines. We also attended public meetings including an OECD conference on

mining in Skellefteå in northern Sweden. Participating in seminars, following discussions and informal conversations with attendees helped us understand how expert knowledge, the interests of the mining industry and policy development shape narratives about mining in relation to development and responsibility.

4.2. Material

The fieldwork material consist of interview transcripts and observation notes, transcribed and treated as text. Policy documents and reports included the National Mineral Strategy, a CERD statement report against the mining project in Rönnebäcken, three municipal reports on the impacts of and attitudes towards mining investments in Storuman and four reports from Swedish Geological Survey. We also studied websites of associations and companies involved with the mining projects including the Mining Resistance Network website, Facebook communities, the mining companies' sites, the website for the Vapsten Sami cultural association and the government funded page 'Mining for Generations' and the Storuman Municipality website. Finally, we also studied newspaper articles and reports about the mining projects published in regional and national media. A list of the studied sites are included in [Appendix A](#).

4.3. Methods of analysis

In our analysis of the material, we searched for stories about space, place and land use. We paid attention to how a person's subject position influenced both the way the narratives were produced and the effect this had on the mobilisation of the narrative and subsequent connection to normative systems (c.f. Fortmann, 1995). Policy documents (c.f. Roe, 1994) as well as websites were also examined to study how land and space were assigned different purposes (e.g. a strategic resource, a homeland or a cultural site, in need of development) and how artefacts such as maps and manifestos were used to define and lay claim to space, e.g. the marking of indigenous sites in municipal planning documents.

In order to address the divergent aspects of territorial production, we approached the stories in the material as narratives that defined and made claims to land. We identified the larger discourses on which they drew based on how their recurrence but also in relation to previous literature that showed how they were more than personal recounts of events. For example, we show how the Swedish government produces a narrative where 'mining is conflated with sustainable development' (Kirsch (2010; 2014). Building on Tamanaha's (2008) work on how 'legal pluralism' can enable actors to draw on different normative systems to enforce their rights, we show how actors legitimise their narratives into enforceable claims to land.

There is often a disparity in power between normative systems, due to the difference in the ability to enforce a certain set of norms (Tamanaha, 2008). However, by 'freezing' time and activities when analysing the material generated from the interviews (Arora-Jonsson, 2013: 11) we lend all the narratives we encounter in the 'open moment' equal weight. This means that 'we take as important that which was said and done at the particular time to explain the present. The actions taken and words used we took as exemplars and acts that solidify meanings and indicate underlying structures of meaning rather than being properties of specific people' (c.f. Arora-Jonsson, 2013: 11). In this way it is possible to understand how actors whose actions and narratives are often disregarded in the more visible contradictory positions that take precedence over time, also do influence the outcome of territorial struggles and how relations produced in the midst of open moments may provide the openings for change.

5. Land use in Storuman

Storuman is situated in the *glesbygd* in northern Sweden and has been the site of natural resource extraction. The websites of Storuman

municipality describe the area as having long been home to production forestry eight hydroelectric power plants and more recently, a wind power park consisting of 99 wind-turbines. The presence of such infrastructural activities has shaped both landscape and social relations (Edlund, 1989). The state, private companies or private landowners own large tracts of production forests. A majority of Swedish forests are owned by men (SCB, 2019), and forest governance is a largely white male enterprise (Laszlo Ambjörnsson, 2021). This also reflects how forest ownership and management is organized in Storuman.

In the interviews, it was clear that the hydroelectric dams had left lasting memories and emotions. The power plants brought employment, but as valleys were flooded, the dams resulted in a devastating loss of property. In Rönnbäck, the regulation of the waters resulted in the flooding of the valley of Björkvattsdalen, and many inhabitants, a majority of whom were Sami, had to relocate (Strand and Ronnhed, 1992). Interviewees lamented both the loss of land and the low compensation granted by the state. One resident remarked, “They [our ancestors] were fooled [by the state lawyers] and then forced to leave.”

Storuman municipality is home to two RHCs, *Vapsten* and *Ubmjeje tjeälddie*. There are also two other major Sami organisations in Storuman, *Vapsten Stije* and *Vapsten Lappby*. In the early 20th century, the Swedish state forcibly relocated Sami communities from northern to south Sweden. The relocated northern reindeer-herders came to replace the southern Sami in the *Vapsten* RHC and with the passing of the RFA, the northern group secured control over the RHC. The process led to deep conflicts between the two groups (Lantto, 2014). Differences between the Sami communities have continued to colour Sami relations, also in relation to the Rönnbäck mine (Arora-Jonsson, 2019). The conflict is between the reindeer herding *Vapsten* RHC on the one hand and *Vapsten Stije* and *Lappby* on the other. *Vapsten Stije* and *Lappby* consist of South Sami. The former protect the interests and heritage of South Sami, while the latter works to reclaim the lost reindeer grazing rights.

Storuman has been (and still is) heavily shaped by state territoriality. Like most of the municipalities in the northern inland, infrastructure, property relations and land use have been shaped towards resource extraction and in its wake other claims to land have been ignored or overruled. The coming of the three mining projects, just like the recent wind power park, can be seen as a continuation of this territorial configuration.

6. Mining in Sweden and Storuman

The mining projects in Storuman and the ways they ‘open up’ territorial configurations needs to be put in relation to mining practices in Sweden and how these are shaped through contemporary mining politics, policies and history. Mining in Sweden stretches back to the middle ages and plays a key role in the Swedish national economy (Geijerstam et al., 2011). Today, Sweden is the largest exporter of iron ore in the EU (SGS, 2019), shedding light on the position mining holds in Swedish politics. Two governmental agencies are tasked with overseeing and administering the mining industry, the Geological Survey of Sweden (SGS) and the Mining Inspectorate (MI). Both agencies produce documents, maps and policy texts in which they define areas of ‘national interest’ for the mining industry.⁵ In addition to SGS and MI, the permitting process is also mediated through the Environmental Courts and the County Administrative Boards. In most matters of mining permitting processes, municipalities in Sweden have only an advisory role.

The *Mineral Strategy* (2013), the central document guiding the Swedish government’s stance on mining is a ‘policy narrative’ (Roe, 1994) that begins with describing mining and minerals as strategic resources for Sweden’s economic and technological development. After

making a case for the under-utilisation of minerals in Sweden (i.e. presenting the lack of extraction as a problem to be overcome), the authors state that since mines are dependent on mineral-rich areas, other types of land use within those areas need to adapt or shift to make room for the mines, supplying a solution (*Mineral Strategy*, 2013: 26). The solution reduces other claimants and land users to “other” business interests.⁶ The *Mineral Strategy* is an exemplar of how the Swedish government looks to the market and state bureaucracy to regulate mining in Sweden (Anshelm et al., 2018), turning issues of indigenous rights and land struggles into administrative problems.

In Storuman, mining is a recent activity. The first operational mine was a gold mine that started in 2005 in Svartliden, in the eastern part of the municipality. The goldmine is now depleted, but the Australian owner, *Dragon Mining* (2015), hopes to expand its operations in adjacent sites. Two failed and infamous zinc mining projects, *Blaiken* and *Svårträsk* established between 2008 and 2012 had considerable negative environmental impacts and continue to leak toxic metals into adjacent rivers and lakes (SGS, 2021a; SGS, 2021b).

The mining projects we study in Barsele, Rönnbäcken and Kyrkberget, are claims to land sanctioned by two different permits from the state, i.e., exploration and concession permits, and are as such expressions of how state territoriality shape a budding mining region. State territoriality is not expressed through mining practices, but through the permitting processes. Exploration permits are bounded tracts of land which give the owner exclusive rights to explore the land for minerals (SGS, 2016). They grant access to far larger areas than an eventual mine, and within their boundary, the company can obtain detailed information about the bedrock. The permits are also used to protect potential ore deposits from rivaling exploration companies. A concession permit ensures the holder exclusive usufruct rights to the minerals within the area designated for extraction. Concession permits last for 25 years and within that time-period, permits can be sold to another mining company if extraction is deemed viable (SGS, 2016).

7. ‘Open moments’ in Storuman

The introduction of the potential mining projects opened up for uncertainty over land and a melee of claims, actions and emotions. Through the lens of this open moment we analyse how specific territorial narratives are mobilized and (re)territorializes land in Storuman 1) through the production of technical, historical and personal knowledge about the land and places 2) by politicising the present through narratives of belonging, marginalisation and identity and 3) by staking claims to territory through narratives of responsibility and morality.

We identify several different normative systems’ (Tamanaha, 2008) in which people anchored their narratives: Swedish state legislation, the capitalist/economic normative system associated especially with the mining industry, environmentalism, indigenous rights as well as on a normative system of customary rights and cultural norms. In contrast to state legislation, the latter also go beyond formal laws and regulations. As we show ahead, there need not be clear-cut lines between normative systems or narratives. For example, to a certain degree, state law acknowledges indigenous rights and at the same time, indigenous rights are tied to both customary rights and international legislation.

7.1. Producing and mobilising knowledge: making maps, uncovering histories and the battle over expertise

Open moments in Storuman generated different forms of knowledge about the mining projects, as actors narrated territory in contrasting ways. State and mining company narratives drew on maps, histories and

⁵ See Hallberg & Reginiussen (2018) for a recent example relating to the availability of critical raw materials in Swedish bedrock.

⁶ See Lawrence & Åhrén (2016) for a description of how the Swedish state turn Sami usufructory rights to reindeer pastures into “interests”, potentially weakening the Sami RHC’s claims to land.

symbols, but at the same time, actors opposed to the mining projects use the same artefacts and their own histories to challenge state territorial claims, producing their own narratives to unravel those mobilised by their opponents. Even in the latter, narratives could be anchored in the same normative system of state law.

When state actors reproduce a narrative in which Sweden can be divided into mining regions, mining companies and lobby groups that produce market projections, technical reports and feasibility studies naturalise mining as the preferred land use. At the OECD conference on mining in Skellefteå (participant observation, 2019-06-13) narratives on mining regions were produced and mobilised in the interactions between civil servants, politicians, policy-makers and the mining industry as they discussed how mining regions and state legislation could be shaped to deal with potential mining investments. Participants included representatives of mining companies, think tanks, politicians and civil servant and three panellists from three indigenous communities, all of whom were middle-aged men. The conference became a platform where the narrative of the 'mining regions' (c.f. Vela-Almeida, 2018) was reaffirmed. In workshops and lectures on the mining industry's future, participants at the conference produced 'expert knowledge' on mineral extraction and mining politics. Together the conference participants both constructed and mobilised a coherent narrative of what constitutes a 'good mining territory' how such a territory should be governed. The indigenous representatives were heard in two different forums and while they were critical of the emergent narrative of the mining territory, their calls to include steering mechanism such as Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) were politely listened to and then ignored.

In Storuman, mining company actors recounted how data from drilling and through geophysical analyses of the landscape was turned into reports and projections about profits from mineral extraction. The land that the mining companies explored was thus territorialised into 'mining regions' through the production of knowledge about the land. Regardless of the projects current low activity, the permit is used to attract investors. Resistance to the mines by the Sami groups in the area led to an inquiry by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) that criticised the Swedish state for violating Sami land rights (CERD, 2020). While the state, through the Mining Inspectorate declared the criticism irrelevant, the project came to a halt in 2016 due to the efforts of the resistance network but ultimately to a rapid decline in nickel prices. Despite a moratorium on activity on the ground, the company continues to produce geophysical reports, and to report on changes in nickel price and in May 2021, the company, now under the ownership of BlueLake Minerals, announced that they were preparing a pre-feasibility study on the project (BlueLake minerals, 2021). This information imbues the mountains targeted by the project with mining potential, based on imagined profits that could be made from a future mine. Thus, Nickel Mountain did not only lay claims to land through permits but also lends strength and credibility to their claims by mobilising a narrative of mining regions where their project is described as a preferable use of land.

The local government in Storuman has also been a part of knowledge production that shapes the narrative of the mining region. In response to the coming of the mining project, a 'visionary report' was produced by a consultant agency contracted by Storuman municipality.⁷ In the report *Investment effects in Storumans Municipality 2015–2030* (Lindahl et al., 2016), the authors present scenarios of how mining projects would benefit the local economy. The report, meant to be the basis for informed policy in Storuman was, during an interview with one of its proponents, referred to as a "propaganda text" for promoting a predefined political trajectory. Producing knowledge to frame the mining projects locally was part and parcel of taking control over the uncertainty in the open moment. Local government, international institutions, mining

companies and state agencies here all contribute in different ways in the knowledge production that is intrinsic to the narrative of a mining region, which is rapidly redefining land and land use in Storuman. Anchored in state law and an economic/capitalist normative system, the narrative bring together actors across scales and legitimizes their different claims to land.

Documents and artefacts were not only the preserve of official actors but also inhabitants. Contrary to state agencies and mining companies' knowledge production on the mining nation, technical knowledge about mining was also used by local inhabitants to question the legitimacy of mining projects and counter their territorialising effects. Landowners in Barsele and Gunnarn collected and saved mining documents to be able to challenge mining projects such as that of the Canadian company Agnico-Eagle (AE) gold mining project in Barsele. The Mineral Act (Sweden. Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation, 1991) stipulates that in mineral exploration, landowners are to be provided with work plans, detailing how and where exploration activities would be carried out on their land, where the drilling would take place and the roads that they would build. Maja, a geo-biologist related that this information could be used to regulate AEs' access to land. As a spokesperson for her father's estate, Maja, who had worked with mineral exploration in the past, challenged AE's progression in the area, and questioned their professionalism, challenging the credibility of their plans. She used the workplans to oppose the company's claims to land. She made use of the material produced by the mining companies as well as state policies and legislation, to regulate AE's actions on the lands that they had claimed through exploration permits. Drawing on the same normative system (i. e. state law) as AE, Maja managed to make changes to details of company practice. She suggested that the key difference between her and many farmers and landowners was a difference in knowledge. Other landowners, villagers, local civil servants and politicians described the processes around the opening of a mine as highly complex and hard to grasp. To engage with the mining projects, it was felt that you needed to have the right expertise and resources. Maja's actions reveal how a person's level of education might be just as or more important to make a successful claim to land as holding property rights, as she uses her knowledge to disassemble the territorial narrative of the mining region.

Sami groups used a repertoire of sources that drew upon a normative system of indigenous rights. In Rönnebäcken, a member of the resistance network explained how they had been documenting the actions of the mining company and their responses. They collected formal letters of appeal against the permitting process, officially issued permits for mineral exploration as well as material that would lend credibility to a different narrative, that of an indigenous past. They wrote local histories, collected maps on the historic boundaries of indigenous property and invited biologists to carry out inventories of biodiversity at the mining sites. Biologists from a nationwide environmental organisation listed endangered and rare flora and fauna and created material that supported both environmental and indigenous claims. Thereby they made connections to both indigenous and environmentalist normative systems. The knowledge they produced and the artefacts they collected became intrinsic parts of these systems (c.f. Rose, 1994). The resistance group used this knowledge to challenge mining projects, anchoring the current struggle in a history of the Swedish state's colonisation of Sami land (Lantto and Mörkenstam, 2015) as well as modernist systems of environmentalism and preservation of biodiversity.

As we sat in the kitchen of an elderly Sami woman, Stina, active in Sami politics all her life, she kept excusing herself to fetch a book, documents on past land judgments, minutes from meetings or to show us past photographs of her family in the landscape - evidence that her belonging to this land was beyond doubt. She drew on her deep knowledge of history and strengthened her story with old documents to make a credible narrative legitimised by a normative system of indigenous rights, thereby reaffirming the undisputable existence of indigenous territory. Other Sami actors also showed us documents from the past to prove claims. The documents, evidence of belonging to that land,

⁷ As a response to a previous critical report by Beland Lindahl et al.,(2016)

revealed a people who had the right to call themselves Sami with legitimate claims to the land. Artefacts such as photographs and old maps combined with personal histories were important in producing knowledge about an indigenous territory. This knowledge was used to gather people around a narrative of an indigenous land, a narrative that was in sharp contrast to that of a mining region.

Accessing and mobilising knowledge about indigeneity as a way of claiming land was also evident at a meeting of the municipal committee for Sami issues (2019–02-25). At the meeting, city planners and Sami representatives, both from the civil society and the RHCs marked out important cultural sites on maps to guide municipal development. The plan was meant to protect Sami heritage, but was also a public recognition of indigeneity. In such a case, the narrative of indigeneity was mapped on to the normative system of state laws, and at the same time confirmed the authority of the municipality in matters concerning indigenous lands.

These processes of knowledge production both by the inhabitants as well state agencies and mining companies shows how the mobilisation of knowledge and how linking knowledge to normative systems are acts of establishing credibility when narrating land into territory.

7.2. Making Territory in the present: Narratives of marginalisation and belonging

In this section we focus on how inhabitants mobilise narratives of marginalisation, belonging and identity to define space and their access to land, sometimes through networks that extended well beyond the place itself. While these territorial narratives were not always related to the mining projects, they become entangled with them as they contested the mining projects' claims to space as yet another example of the 'colonisation of their attachment to place' (c.f. Arora-Jonsson, 2019).

7.2.1. Marginalisation from rightful claim to territory

Much like in other places in Sweden's northern inland, a narrative of having been marginalised by central authorities (Arora-Jonsson, 2013) evoked a collective belonging to territory and cut across many otherwise divisive accounts by various actors. Relations between the northern inland and urban centres and especially in relation to Stockholm were recurrently described by inhabitants as a colonisation, marginalisation and exploitation of their homes. Descriptions of living in a region defined through an unequal relationship between the centre and periphery were plentiful. Talking about how resources from peripheral areas were extracted without any benefits to the region and its people, a young Sami woman pointed out the irony in that although their region supplied electricity to the south, their local community centre had to be shut down because they had no money to pay the electricity bill. Elderly Sami inhabitants related how Sweden had colonised the mountains near the Norwegian border in a process that went on as late as the 1920's. They spoke of growing up in the aftermath of these times, where the Swedish State, through reconfigurations of property regimes (or by ignoring them), stole their rights to land.

In a telephone conversation, Olof, a man living near the Barsele mine, related a story that we had come to recognise and which could be summarised as

"We don't want the mine, but we have no right [or way to oppose it]."

According to Olof, there was no point in meeting up for an interview as there was nothing anyone could do about the mining project anyway.

'If the company wants a mine, there will be a mine.'

In his view, time after time, it had been made clear that when it came to the riches of the north, local inhabitants did not matter. Olof narrated a history of the northern inland as a colony to the powers in the south in all but name, drawing on a discourse of colonialism. His story was of a

territory where the voices, rights and interests of local citizens were at odds with that of large companies and the Swedish state. A similar description was given by Erik, a landowner from Rönnebäcken. He explained that the government and large companies never cared for the people in these areas. His story was about how his family had their land stolen from them by the state, and that now the mines would do the same, so it was better to just accept it and see how one might benefit from the projects.

In an interview with Göran and Ines, an elderly married couple from Gunnarn who owned land affected by the Agnico Eagle project in Barsele, Göran looked over to his wife and smiled,

We have grown jaded...all these dams and power plants and all kinds of projects. ... you can't kill yourself over them. But still... we don't like it. [...] It's like they pull out the rug from under you, where you stand. And these large companies, they don't care about the little guy [...] We just have to let them work, we can't stop them. Because then Uncle Blue [the police] would come and get you

While this statement may be regarded as acceptance in face of external pressures, there was also an underlying message of endurance, of persevering in face of unjust state practices. By keeping alive the narrative of marginalisation, they were also reaffirming their place as citizens with equal rights as that of those in cities but that were being denied to them (c.f. Arora-Jonsson, 2013). An example of more active resistance was related by Henrik from Tärnaby (2020-03-09), who claimed that although hunting was not permitted on public land without hunting permits given out by the County Administrative Board, people still hunted on public land in the mountains. Henrik explained that what was now public land used to be the village commons, and therefore many people asserted hunting and fishing rights as rightfully theirs. Through hunting, the hunter challenges state territoriality and redefines the forest as a place where hunting can take place (c.f. Holmes, 2007). In contrast to Maja's reliance on law, this territorial narrative contested state law and was anchored in a normative system of customary rights, maintained by the communities that made use of hunting grounds.

Göran and Ines described their marginality as enduring against the odds. They drew upon a larger normative system of national belonging and in that sense territorialised space as belonging to them, although they were unable to do much about it besides being stoic and independent. Stories of marginalisation and stoic endurance, while overtly signalling acceptance, also portrayed an underlying story of struggling communities against state power and market interests. While this appears as acceptance, their narrative kept alive and reaffirmed an attachment to land. They brought to the fore rights they were being denied as citizens in the wider nation, evoking a quiet counter-territorialisation. This narrative of marginalisation was evident in stories across the board among the people we interviewed and tied people together to the place. It explained how land became territorialised by external interests (e.g. mining companies or the state). It also provided a basis for mobilising opposition against external land claims, also by actors who had conflicting claims to land themselves. However, while the narrative of marginality brought together actors across Storuman, through a shared experience of being marginalized it does not necessarily stand in conflict with the mining projects claims to land. Erik's statement of how the potential benefits of the mining company also draw upon the same narrative, showing how the narrative of marginality and that of the mining region overlap.

7.2.2. Belonging and identity

In Storuman, belonging was described in two different but connected ways. The first was a belonging to place that made you a legitimate voice on land issues. This form of belonging was an expression of a person's identity, tying the person to a specific territory (Wastl-Walter and Staeheli, 2013; Antonisch, 2016). It was a narrative that enabled claims to land based on normative systems of the nation but also to customary

and indigenous rights. The second was belonging described as resources that belonged to a specific actor or group.

In Rönnbäck these contradictory understandings of belonging shaped the conflict between the local resistance group and the mining company. For shareholders and representatives of the company, belonging was about ownership of land, that is, of having exclusive access to the land in order to extract minerals, claims enforceable through state legislation. In contrast, was belonging of citizenship as described above as well as the members of the resistance-network expressed themselves, was a belonging to the land itself, making them legitimate claimants. They did so based on their families having lived there since time immemorial and on their traditional livelihoods (e.g. hunting, fishing, foraging and reindeer herding) tied closely to the landscape. Here, we can see how belonging is narrated differently, but nonetheless belonging is understood as a way of having certain rights to a specific area of land. In the narrative of the mining region, the land belongs to an owner, while in the narrative of an indigenous territory, belonging indicates an intimate connection to the land. Mats, a farmer and landowner whose family had lived and worked in Gunnarn for five generations expressed both forms of belonging. He recounted that his forest property was the place where he learnt to tend to nature.

“This place...is a family farm. Everyone who shares my surname comes from this farm.”

For Mats, the forests were both economic security and sites of belongingness (Antonsich, 2010). Tina, a Sami and member of the Rönnbäck resistance network reflected on the history of state intervention and the strong connection between belonging to the land and having the right to its resources,

It is state policy that legitimises interventions on land. Policies decide, “Now we will do this and that is for that and so on”. That is an exercise of power. for us it is definitely something to think about. Who can define this place? And who can define Sápmi? And who has done so throughout history and here in this place [...] All the interventions that have taken place...We are not even represented or allowed to raise our voices although we have always lived here. So the interesting question is: Who has the right to define the place, who can do it? And what tools do we have?

By questioning the right to define a place, Tina brings belonging, rather than property, as way to claim rights to land. Drawing on this ‘sense of belongingness’ (Antonsich, 2010) the resistance network in Rönnbäck successfully mobilised resistance strong enough to subvert the mining company’s claims to land, not by virtue of holding contemporary property rights but through brining to the fore a narrative of indigenous past and present.

In the open moment, when territorial configurations are made uncertain, identities can be called into question. Erik who lived close to the Rönnbäck mine was of Sami descent but did not necessarily identify himself as Sami. He questioned how people could define themselves as Sami without any connection to reindeer-herding, which he saw as an integral part of being Sami. He argued that claims to indigeneity were not enough to make claims to land if you did not at the same time practice reindeer-herding and were a member of an RHC. Claims to land rooted in a narrative of indigenous identity could thus be challenged in the open moment by questioning who had the right to call themselves indigenous. Tina and Erik’s words point to the link between identity and territory.

The open moment led to the resurfacing of conflicts over land and identity between the Southern Sami community and the members of Vapsten RHC. However, confronted with plans for the mine, the two groups overlooked past differences and took a joint stance against the mine. Despite the entangled history of conflict between the groups, a shared narrative of belonging took shape. While both groups came together in their petition to CERD, the underlying struggle over land

rights remained and gained new momentum in the open moment. The Vapsten RHC asserted their position as an actor with usufructory rights based on their membership in the RHC, to which the South Sami did not have access. In their cause against the mine, both groups activated networks consisting of forums well beyond the place itself - such as the Sami Parliament, the national parliament, the Nordic Sami council and indigenous movements across the world - that gave legitimacy to their claims based on a narrative of indigeneity and belonging. The Rönnbäck project became connected to a larger story of exploitation and violation of indigenous rights on a global scale and coincided with falling nickel prices to stall the planned mine. The open moment provided wholly new possibilities for groups to take place in deliberations that previously had been inaccessible. The uncertainty opened up for the Sami who lacked membership in the Vapsten RHC to make claims to land. And while this mobilisation was successful in subverting the claims of the mining company, it also turned into a struggle between the two groups over who could be considered a legitimate narrator.

Although most actors on the ground often described mining as an issue that was too technical to comprehend (c.f. Envall, 2018), they nonetheless took part in (re)producing narratives wherein mining projects were presented as a threat, as a necessary evil or a future possibility. The political potential in these narratives of belonging and marginalisation becomes apparent in open moments as they coincide with narratives on taking responsibility for economic development, environmentalism and/or indigenous rights.

7.3. Territorialising through growth and environmental protection: narratives of responsibility and morality

Mining projects were presented, especially by official authorities, as a responsible step towards creating a “new, green and sustainable society” and as developmental projects that could change the trajectory of rural decline. In such narratives of responsibility, being against a mine was seen as being against the survival of the local community. These narratives drew on discourses of the northern inland as territories in need of development. These actors connected narratives of responsibility with the normative systems of state legislation and capitalist/economic norms.

At the local government, the chairman⁸ of the Municipal Board in Storuman too described the mining projects as possibilities of turning rural decline in the *glesbygd* into growth. Growth was seen as an increase in population and potential taxpayers. The chairman was active in promoting the mining projects as large-scale investments that would aid the local economy, granted that they passed the permitting process. Although he stressed the importance to adhere to the formal permitting processes and thus downplayed the municipality’s ability to influence decisions regarding the mining projects, he also took steps to ensure the opening of the mines. When the Kyrkberget project had some of its permits revoked by the County Administration in Västerbotten, the chairman took it upon himself to write a letter to the Swedish government. In the letter he described the positive economic impacts the mine would have for the municipality, describing Storuman as a site in need of external investments. In his reasoning, mining projects would counter the effects of their marginal position in the country, making them part of a narrative rooted in normative systems economic growth and state legislation.

In contrast, for others such as the Sami and environmental groups, taking responsibility for future generations was about protecting the environment and communities from exploitation. They drew on discourses of environmental protection and indigenous rights. The resistance network’s invitation to biologists to do an inventory of biodiversity at the mining site was an effort to show what was being

⁸ The chairman represents the leading party in the municipality, which since 2006 is the liberal Centre party.

risked by exploiting the minerals in the mountains.

Contesting the narrative of responsibility through economic growth, the Left party in Storuman has taken a formal stance against the mining projects. According to one politician, mining projects are yet another example of the Swedish state and private companies' attempt to exploit the northern inland, which partly aligns this narrative with narratives on marginalisation. His argument was bolstered by reports on how mining has done little to increase the population and that a majority of the studies on the benefit of mines are ex-ante and show no evidence of growth in the region with mines. Furthermore, estimates of growth disregard the huge costs of environmental clean-ups (Lesser et al., 2016). The Left thus both challenged the narrative of responsibility presented by the chairman and appealed to environmental concerns.

In interviews as well as in texts such as the *Mineral Strategy* (2013), the municipal report on investment effects (Lindah et al., 2016) and in news editorials (From et al., 2019) mining in Sweden is presented as

'needing to take responsibility for the minerals we use.'

The narrative is grounded in state legislation and in appeals to sense of superiority by asserting that Swedish mining and environmental legislation is better equipped to ensure "sustainable mining" than most other countries where mining takes place. This was exemplified by a member of the Christian Democrat party during a public lecture in Tarnaby on 'The Electric Car and the hunt for Metals' (participant observation 2019-02-26), where she argued for the need to extract cobalt in Sweden. She argued that by not doing so and wanting increased production of car batteries at the same time, Sweden was actively contributing to child labour in Congo's cobalt mines. In her iteration of the narrative of responsibility, she contrasted Storuman with other less responsible places in the global South, in this case, mining sites in Congo. A moral responsibility can be seen as being used to territorialise Swedish rural spaces by invoking Sweden's responsibility as a democratic and equal nation. In contrast, Congo was described as a place where laws and regulations did not work. Sustainable and responsible mining in Sweden was thus framed in relation to the existence of an "other," seen as irresponsible and unable to govern itself. Such a narrative of responsibility in relation to what are portrayed as the not-so-developed countries of the global South (Arora-Jonsson, 2018) stipulated that access to land was a question of taking responsibility, not only for your own village but for the whole world.

In face of the resistance to mining, mining companies justified their claims to land by pointing to society's need for modern green technology. The head of operations (COO) at the Agnico Eagle mining project in Barsele, suggested that without metals, we would not be able sit in the room where we conducted the interview, as metal was used in everything around us. Following this reasoning, the COO argued that if someone was against mining projects but still willing to use modern technology such as mobile phones, this person was being hypocritical. Accepting the opening of new mine was described as a way for people taking responsibility for their own consumption and a natural consequence of modern life. Interestingly, AE's operations target gold. According to the *World Gold Council* (2021) (of which AE is a member), 90 % of global gold demand is for jewellery or to be stored for economic security. Gold has limited importance for the future of green technology, but in the narrative mobilised by the COO, it became connected to a discourse of technological innovation in order to legitimise their claims to land.

The COO's argument echoed statements made at the OECD conference in Skellefteå where policy-makers and mining companies foresaw a green mining boom to meet the demand for metals needed for green technologies. At the conference, increased mineral extraction was presented as an inevitable part of a green future, and areas rich in minerals were targeted for meeting the demands for this future. By invoking future needs, rural land was to be appropriated for the grand project of making a sustainable future for the world. However, this was countered

in other interviews. According to Tina,

"I think that the argument [that we need to take responsibility for sustainability] is ugly, as it is used to give people a bad conscience. What Sweden is really exporting...with iron ore, is a poor system for how mines should be managed...of how one can act in mining areas towards local communities, what demands we can put on companies [...] At the moment, these companies go into countries and say "you can rest assured because we are doing what we do in Sweden! But there are no demands on companies to [...] act humanely or respect indigenous rights (here)....."

Tina criticised how the narrative of responsibility was used to make claims to land built on false premises. For her, responsibility entailed caring for and living off the land and the environment and protecting it for future generations. Her narrative connected to different normative systems – that of indigenous rights and environmentalism, but in a very different way. Responsibility framed in terms of environmentalism and indigeneity were contrasted with those where responsibility and an environmentalism that promoted sustainable extraction of minerals as a moral imperative.

Attempts to define the future by officials were, as we argue, attempts at controlling uncertainty and closing the open moment. On the other hand, by bringing attention to biodiversity and environmental concerns, others tried to keep it open by drawing on normative systems of environmentalism and indigeneity. Narratives of responsibility and morality emerged in the open moment to explain why the mining projects needed to be pursued or contested. "Taking responsibility" territorialised land in different ways.

8. Conclusions: Openings at the intersections of making territory

In this paper we have argued that the fluid and continuous production of territory (defined as a 'space appropriated by political projects' (c.f. Elden, 2013; Halvorsen, 2019; Storey 2012) can be understood through an analysis of narratives mobilised in an 'open moment.' An open moment (Lund, 2016) or a turbulent event lays bare the power relations structuring the place (Das, 1995; Moore, 2011; Moore, 1987). By taking such an open moment as a point of departure and analysing the narratives produced in that moment, we show not only underlying structures but also how territory is made in the everyday by a multiplicity of actors, both from above and below, power exerted over land and change is possible.

As we show, the narratives produced in that moment were based in different normative systems (Tamanaha, 2008) and were vital in making lasting claims to space and thereby for the production of territory. Our narrative approach revealed how a multiplicity of actors, both 'from above (e.g. state and mining companies) and below (e.g. villagers or local associations) used narratives to make powerful and lasting claims to land. While the mining companies made use of state law as well as stories of potential development of green technology and employment to make their claims to land, people living in the villages compiled histories and made inventories over biodiversity to form narratives that made contrasting or opposing claims to the same land.

Our approach where we froze time and accorded all narratives equal weight (Arora-Jonsson, 2013:13) also revealed how narratives overlapped and intersected and not only conflicted with each other. This enabled us to move beyond the perspectives of 'above' and 'below' by showing how actors linked up around- or contested certain narratives. This is exemplified by how the narratives on marginalisation and belonging, though seemingly apolitical, were mobilised and reproduced by actors who had divergent positions regarding the mining projects. Marginalisation ties in with narratives of development and economic growth, but also with narratives of colonialism and indigenous lands.

Finally, territorial narratives provided us with insight into how

territorialisation is both intertwined with and can change subject positions on the ground. While property and usufruct rights were and remain important to the production of territory in Storuman, identities shaped along the lines of gender, ethnicity, class and level of education were central to the mobilisation of territorial narratives. Actors operating in the open moment used narratives to steer the future of land use by calling upon different normative systems, and in doing so had to present themselves as credible narrators. Credibility was dependent on an actors' subject position, but, as the examples of Tina and Maja, it does not need to entail property or usufruct rights that are often dependent on being male. In their case, education and a profession in the mainstream society and/or living on the land were dimensions of power that intersected to legitimize their voices. Like Fortmann (1994), we show that the claiming of space and land is connected to the subject positions of the narrators and their ability to mobilise actors around a legitimate claim to land.

We have shown how claims to land and natural resources is equated with taking responsibility for the development of 'green technology'. By paying attention to territorial narratives it is possible to expand our understanding on how actors take possession over land, not only through legal means or force, but also by drawing upon discourses that make their claims to land appear self-evident and morally just. As such, territorial narratives can be a tool to address the injustices and the reproduction of colonial practices in contemporary natural resource extraction.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Arvid Stiernström: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Seema Arora-Jonsson:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Funding acquisition.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Appendix A. Text material

News articles:

Published: 2013-11-09 <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/gruvan-inte-livs viktig>

Published: 2014-07-01 <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/regeringsbeslut-om-gruvdrift-rattsprovas>

Published: 2014-07-15 <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/kritiken-mot-gruvplaner-vaxer>

Published: 2014-10-31 <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/renagarna-forlorade-igen>

Published: 2015-11-13 <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/krav-pa-gruvbolaget-avveckla-tillstanden>

Published: 2016-05-17 <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/kanadensiskt-foretag-storsatsar-i-barsele>
<https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/6701302> 2017-05-22

Published: 2019-01-17 <https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/7133913>

Published: 2019-02-11 <https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/7153100>

Published: 2019-09-29 <https://www.svd.se/sluta-hyckla-om-meta llbehovet>

Published: 2019-11-12 <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/vasterbotten-mecka-for-mineraljagarna>

<https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/fn-s-uppmaning-till-sverige-om-ronnbacksgruvan-gor-om-gor-ratt>

Published: 2020-12-07 <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/fn-s-uppmaning-till-sverige-om-ronnbacksgruvan-gor-om-gor-ratt>

Webpages and Social Media:

Agnico Eagle, Barsele project webpage, available at: <https://www.agnicoeagle.com/English/exploration/exploration-projects/barsele/default.aspx> accessed 2021-09-12, accessed 2021-09-12

Bluelake mineral webpage, Rönnbäcken projects, available at: <https://bluelakemineral.com/en/projects/nickel/> accessed 2021-09-12

Business Sweden webpage Mining for Generations, available at: <https://www.miningforgenerations.com/>, accessed 2021-09-12

Investments effects in Storuman Municipality 2015-2030, available at <https://www.storuman.se/Nyheter/investerings effekter-2015-2030/>, accessed 2021-09-12

Project report from "Regional Innovation in the Nordic Arctic Region and Scotland with a Special Focus on Regions with Large scale Projects", Storuman, available at 2021-09-12 <https://www.storuman.se/Naringsliv-arbete/Naringsliv/Projektverksamhet/regina/> accessed 2021-09-12

Social consequence of mining in Storuman municipality, Survey report, available at <https://www.storuman.se/Nyheter/rapport-fran-en-katundersokning-om-gruvdrift/>, accessed 2021-09-12

Stop the mine in Rönnbäcken Facebook group, available at: https://www.facebook.com/groups/stoppagruvan/?multi_permalink=4347756098594528¬if_id=1631205718900228¬if_t=group_activity&ref=notif, accessed 2021-09-12

Stop the mine in Rönnbäcken webpage, available at: <https://stoppagruvan.wordpress.com/>, accessed 2021-09-12

Storuman Municipality webpage, available at: <https://www.storuman.se/>, accessed 2021-09-12

Swedish geological Survey webpage, mineral resources, available at: <https://www.sgu.se/en/mineral-resources/>, accessed 2021-09-12

Tertiary Mineral webpage, Storuman project, available at: <https://www.tertiaryminerals.com/storuman-fluorspar-project-sweden>, accessed 2021-09-12

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Sustainable development and sacrifice in the rural North

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Abstract

In this article, I examine how the grand narratives of sustainability, development and mining impact local governance in a Swedish municipality. I do this by studying three mining projects under implementation and relate them to notions of development and sacrifice to lend insights into what the new trends of mining in Europe outlined above mean for the rural North. I regard sustainable development as a political concept ascribed to activities (such as political programmes or investments). Based on ethnographic fieldwork in the Storuman municipality, I show how politicians, political parties and government administrators position themselves in relation to the three mining projects. I provide a detailed account of perceptions, responses and practices in a local government that engage with three mining companies seeking to open mines within the municipal borders. I show how a tug of war between ideas of sustainable development or survival through sacrifice depoliticises and stabilises a dominant political line in favour of mining within local politics. While the respondents differed in what they thought that sacrifice might lead to, ranging from environmental disaster and

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social suffering to economic prosperity, I reveal a process wherein sustainable development becomes translated into ‘that which must be sacrificed’.

KEYWORDS

local government, mining, sacrifice, sustainable development

INTRODUCTION

Clarifying the government’s stance on mining in Sweden, the then-newly appointed Swedish Minister of Enterprise explained to a journalist, ‘It is not that we take environmental issues lightly, but yes, we, the Social Democratic Party¹ love mines’ (Ugglå & Nilsson, 2021). With this statement, the minister reaffirmed the central place of mining in the country’s economic development.² This view on mining aligned the government’s mining policy with the 2013 Swedish Mineral Strategy where mines are portrayed as being crucial for employment generation and economic growth, especially in rural areas facing economic decline. This is not to say that mining is a non-political issue. It has generated huge protests from environmentalists and Indigenous rights defenders, as well as created clashes between government agencies (Anshelm & Haikola, 2018; Anshelm et al., 2018). More than ever in Sweden, mining is a deeply political issue with several interests pitted against each other.

The pro-mining narrative resonates with recent developments around the world where new mining is justified by its contribution to ‘sustainable development.’ The extraction of critical metals (e.g., copper, cobalt, nickel and vanadium) is described as crucial for renewable energy production, electric car manufacturing and energy storage (Herrington, 2021). Drawing on Nightingale et al. (2019), I regard sustainable development as a political concept ascribed to activities (political programmes, investments, etc.) that seemingly pursue a ‘state of sustainability’ and that these activities contain normative, contentious or contradictory understandings of what sustainability and development entail. While much research has focussed on the political nature of sustainability, less attention has been paid to what it means for rural areas in the EU and in Nordic countries. Studies from Europe (del Marmol & Vaccaro, 2020; Wilson & Stammer, 2016) however indicate that rural areas, in relation to mining, are taking the brunt of the impact from these extractivist interests, revealing the unequal power relations between urban centres and rural peripheries. For rural areas where welfare services are being dismantled and crucial infrastructure is suffering from neglect, mining investments hold a strong allure for local and regional governments, as they are believed to be able to kickstart the local economies, helping them to catch up with the economically stronger metropolitan areas. As Dale et al. (2018) argue, mining zones, which predominantly are rural, stand out as spaces that are more readily sacrificed for the ‘greater good’ (i.e., the supply of minerals to green transition projects). As one of the main European mining regions, this has specific implications for the far north of the Nordic countries due to the relatively high presence of undeveloped mineral deposits. In this article, I show how the concept of sustainable development is referred to in attempts to shape the outcomes of mining investments at a local level in Storuman on the Nordic periphery.

I study how the grand narratives of sustainability, development and mining impact local governance in a Swedish municipality. I do this by studying three mining projects under

implementation and relate them to notions of development and sacrifice to lend insights into what the new trends of mining in Europe outlined above mean for the rural North. The term mining project is used to describe mines that have not yet begun operation but still exist in some form such as through an exploration permit, land claims, company projections or municipal policies. Thus, they are substantive enough for people to imagine them as a fully operational mine, which shapes how actors react to them, and at the same time, they are surrounded by a high degree of uncertainty as they might or might not be realised (see Stiernström & Arora-Jonsson, 2022).

Municipalities and local governments are important institutions for democracy and development for the local area. They are the political authorities closest to the places impacted by resource extractivism. Research on mining in rural regions of the Nordic countries has provided valuable and varied insights into how actors (e.g., state agencies, mining companies, civil society organisations and reindeer herding communities) relate to mining projects ranging from proposed to operational mines (Lindahl et al., 2018; Poelzer, 2015), as well as into the relationship between mining companies and local actors as they co-construct visions about the future (Haikola & Anshelm, 2018; Komu, 2019) or who holds relevant knowledge in the making of a mine (Dannevig & Dale, 2018). Here, I focus on the narratives of mining and sustainability that unfold through the work of politicians and bureaucrats that are crucial to what sustainability is at a local level. I turn the gaze to what unfolds *within* local politics as the mining projects have unclear futures. Although local governments are shown to be key actors in the studies outlined above, their role and perspectives in shaping mining projects through political (e.g., producing public reports that emphasise the benefits of mining) or administrative practices (e.g., public planning and/or environmental monitoring) need more attention, especially in relation to sustainable development.

I show how the pursuit of new mining projects becomes connected to 'sustainable development', both through large-scale narratives of 'green transformation' and locally through visions of economic growth, adding to recent research on the relationship between the pursuit of a sustainable society and increasing resource extraction (cf., Skorstad et al., 2018). I show how politicians and civil servants in their efforts to develop a stronger economy and social welfare feed into a national political position, wherein mining comes to be perceived as a reasonable sacrifice that will avert the challenges the municipality faces. While marked with tensions and juxtaposed positions between the political parties in local government, the mining projects hold a strong position in municipal politics, a position that at times is regarded as apolitical. I show how this position is maintained, through processes of depoliticisation within the municipal administration and through the reiteration of a history of a rural region that, as Arora-Jonsson (2013, pp. 55–59) puts it, is regarded as 'left behind' and therefore in need of development.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork in the Storuman municipality, I show how politicians, political parties and government administrators position themselves in relation to the three mining projects. The projects seek to extract different minerals and vary in degrees of local protests. I provide a detailed account of perceptions, responses and practices in a local government facing mining projects in order to understand how a tug of war between ideas of sustainable development or survival through sacrifice depoliticises and stabilises a dominant political line in favour of mining.

In the next section, I discuss the literature on sustainability and development in mining as well as work on bureaucracies, to study how the municipal government shapes local mining politics. I then present my methods and background context on Storuman. The analysis begins with a presentation of the local political parties' positioning. From there, I describe how the local bureaucracy depoliticised mining and discuss how this obstructs the participation of municipal citizens. In the final section of the article, I conclude with a discussion on sustainable development,

mining and sacrifice in local politics. Furthermore, I show how sustainability and development can be highly contested and given different meanings at the local level but also how it connects to a readiness to be sacrificed.

Sustainable development, sacrifice and depoliticisation in local mining politics

In the European Union, the push for new mines is evident in policies such as the Green Deal (European Commission, 2019), the Raw Materials Initiative (EURMI) (European Commission, 2008) and more recently in a Communication from the European Commission (European Commission, 2020) wherein increased mineral extraction within the EU is described as being crucial for sustainable development. In the wake of ongoing energy transitions and the pursuit of the elusive goal of sustainability, 'green mining' is re-emerging as a transformative, capitalist presence in rural areas, sometimes marked with dramatic turbulence and violence (Verweijen & Dunlap, 2021). Research on new mining proposals in Europe has found increased tensions between miners, mining companies, local communities and anti-mine activists in Romania (Szabo et al., 2022), Germany (Brock & Dunlap, 2018), Sweden (Fjellborg et al., 2022) and Greece (Hovardas, 2020). In Portugal, Chaves et al. (2021) predict that the EU's increased demand for lithium will lead to new tensions and challenges for local communities. In their overview of extractivism, del Mármol and Vaccaro (2020) assert that mining is becoming a driving force behind socioeconomic transformations in peripheral areas across Europe, egged on by EU policies such as the EURMI.

In rural regions, the reasons behind mining initiatives (and other forms of extractivism, e.g., forestry or energy production) follow a similar logic associated with extractivism across the world (del Mármol & Vaccaro, 2020; Wilson & Stammler, 2016). New extractive projects are seen as protecting 'peripheral areas' from economic stagnation through the development of new infrastructure, local industries and employment opportunities (see also Dale et al., 2018). These processes and effects of mining are oftentimes the result of combining 'mining' with 'development' (Skorstad et al., 2018). Meanwhile, as critics argue, extractivism implies that resources are removed from the region to generate profits elsewhere, causing local environmental degradation and the breakdown of rights and relations to land (for recent examples, see Dunlap & Jakobsen, 2020; Kirsch, 2014; Willow, 2018; Wilson & Stammler, 2016). Lately, research on mining and development has reiterated how mines bring uncertain and disruptive promises of 'development', as capitalist ventures acquire large land areas and transform environmental, social and economic aspects of the everyday lives of local communities (Bebbington & Humphreys Bebbington, 2018; Stiernström & Arora-Jonsson, 2022). These insights, and the tension between development and mining, provide a backdrop for this article.

Sustainability, understood as safeguarding economic, social and environmental dimensions of life becomes impossible to reconcile with the political and social turmoil, often through the disruption of property rights and destruction of ancestral lands, that mining engenders (Skorstad et al., 2018). Research on mining and sustainable development has shown how implementing policies for sustainability in mining does little to transform actual mining practices (Kirsch, 2014, pp. 166–168; Kirsch, 2010). Rather, the mining industry tends to re-define the concept, emphasising that sustainability is about economic stability and growth, downplaying its environmental and social dimensions.

While sustainable mining can be understood as a 'corporate oxymoron' (Benson & Kirsch, 2010), Bebbington and Humphreys-Bebbington (2018) invite us to consider how sustainability

can relate to mining, not in terms of how mining itself can be sustainable but rather if mining can provide the basis or be part of the development of sustainable regions. In the Nordic countries, research can be divided into several fields. First, there is extensive research on Indigenous livelihoods and land rights (e.g., Åhren & Lawrence, 2017; Kløcker Larsen et al., 2016; Lawrence & Larsen, 2017; Lawrence & Moritz, 2019; Österlin & Raitio, 2020). In the former, the development of new mines can be seen as furthering a history of colonial practices, where Indigenous rights are ignored, lost or transformed into ‘interests’ rather than rights, in order to support industrial investment on Indigenous lands. This is a pattern that repeats itself across the globe (cf., Willow, 2018). Second, research has also focused on the development of labour and employment at local and regional levels (e.g., Moritz et al., 2017; Tano et al., 2016), which suggests that mining indeed may be a boost for local economies, but it also creates a situation where communities are precariously dependant on mining for their livelihoods (Poelzer & Ejdemo, 2018; Willow, 2018). A third strand of research focusses on community participation and (mainly social) sustainability (e.g., Hedin & Ranängen, 2017; Jagers et al., 2018; Poelzer, 2015; Segerstedt & Abrahamsson, 2019; Suopajärvi et al., 2017; Tarras-Wahlberg, 2014; Tarras-Wahlberg et al., 2017). These show that the large-scale mining that dominates in the EU can be understood as an outside force imposed and acting on an area rather than a local initiative for natural resource management. Mining, when introduced, is an activity that local residents have to react to, as it takes control of the local environment and dramatically transforms it. Jonas Anshelm and Simon Haikola have examined dominant discourses in Swedish mining politics, as well as the positioning among politicians, the mining industry and resistance movements (Anshelm & Haikola, 2018; Anshelm et al., 2018; Haikola & Anshelm, 2016, 2018). They highlight how mining always is highly political, although it sometimes appears to be depoliticised.

The studies presented above lend valuable insights into how wider mining politics and specific mining projects impact local communities. However, they give limited attention to municipal government activities, as politicians and bureaucrats relate to the prospect of a new mine and face claims and counterclaims on how to proceed. This is crucial, as local governments are well placed to be the arena for deliberation of regional natural resource governance. Furthermore, it is at the local level that the connections between mining, sustainability and ‘sacrifice’ become most prominent.

Sacrifice zones and visions for the future

In their work on mining in the Arctic, Skorstad et al. (2018) discuss the paradox of sustainable mining as a tension between sustainability and ‘sacrifice zones’. Lerner (2012) uses sacrifice zone to refer to an area that becomes endemically toxic and polluted through industrial activities and is in a sense sacrificed for the profit of other areas. As such, it is a way to encapsulate the local effects of extractivism, from the perspective of the site where extraction takes place. In my use of the concept, sacrifice zone is not limited to the mine and its direct environment but is also used to describe a region whose continued existence is dependent on a willingness to sacrifice resources in order to sustain itself. Skorstad et al. (2018) argue that mining will always include spaces that are sacrificed (environmental damages, pollution or loss of land), thereby making the question of mining and sustainability a question about what scale (i.e., local, national or global) sustainability is to be achieved. This has especially important implications for local governments in the rural north given their economic dependency on natural resources. Arora-Jonsson (2013) has shown that in policy-making and the mainstream national imagination, urban areas in

Sweden are equated with economic growth and development, whereas the northern inland is seen as the antithesis, an underdeveloped backwater mainly suitable for resource and energy extraction. Rural inhabitants of the North are similarly depicted as those 'left behind' with few prospects (ibid: pp. 55–59). I show how both the concept of sacrifice and the notion of being 'left behind' intersect in the ways politicians position themselves regarding mining projects.

In the rural North, local governments face high costs to provide social services due to long distances and decreasing revenue arising from a shrinking population. There is a general sense that these challenges must be addressed through political intervention, but these interventions are often made to address an immediate problem rather than finding a long-term solution (cf., Keskitalo et al., 2019; Syssner, 2014). Drawing on work that studies struggling communities in Europe and the US, Syssner (2014) argues that when a certain problem (e.g., declining population) becomes tightly tied to a specific solution (e.g., stimulate local businesses), local governments tend to disregard or downplay alternative ways of understanding and dealing with the problem, creating a set of 'perceptions of what is possible to do'. The tendency to lock down government responses to a problem along a single line of solutions furthers a process of depoliticisation as it narrows down the space for political debate that can offer alternative solutions. In light of this, I go on to show that the view within a local government that a certain sacrifice is necessary for survival (i.e., a willingness to participate in the making of a sacrifice zone) can become regarded as an apolitical and pragmatic standpoint.

In contrast to the perceptions of what is possible, Komu (2019) argues that expectations associated with mining projects can be likened to dreams connected to prosperity, part of a wider narrative of modernity and progress, via industrial transformation with historical antecedents of what Scott (1998) calls an ideology of high modernism. This argument fits the history of the rural North, where industrial investments were regarded as securing progress and developing the left-behind areas (Sörlin, 2019), and I show how the expectations associated with a mining project, as well as perceptions of a broader historical narrative of land use and the relationship between citizens and state, and dreams of economic, social and environmental sustainability, are crucial to understand why politicians act in certain ways.

Haikola and Anshelm (2018) describe how local expectations of benefits from a mine are shaped by a multiplicity of actors (i.e., the mining companies, state institutions, expert consultants and local community actors) who together produce vibrant visions of the future where the new mine drives off problems that the community and local government faced previously. They show that these visions are often persistent even in the event of failure, for example, when a mining company declares bankruptcy without having delivered any of the promises of economic growth or continuation of social services. Building on Haikola and Anshelm's study (ibid.), I show a connection between the visionary aspects of sustainability and mining within municipal politics and everyday practices of policy implementation where public servants contribute to the continuation of the political line. The everyday practices of civil servants and the role of expertise will be the subject of the next section.

Expertise and depoliticisation in local politics

In his work on national mining politics in Sweden, Envall (2018) shows that political debate combines both antagonistic positions regarding mining development and descriptions of mining as being a highly complex and technical issue not suited for non-experts. As Mitchell (2002) has shown in the governing of post-colonial Egypt, access and control over expertise can give

considerable influence (or even set) the political agenda. When ‘experts’ identify problems but also formulate what resources and methods will provide solutions to these problems, this puts them in a position of power vis-a-vis non-experts. Olsson and Hysing (2019), in their work on ‘activist civil servants’, show the importance of networks where politicians, civil servants and other experts interact to produce, sustain or challenge policies. I demonstrate how civil servants and politicians that engage with mining projects not only operate within the confines of the municipal administration but draw on larger networks and forms of accepted knowledge and expertise when they formulate plans and statements.

Dannevig and Dale (2018) demonstrate that the lack of political discussion about mining in local government is dependent on the notion that mining is a technically advanced issue that local government lacks the expertise to address. Similarly, assumptions about the infallibility of scientific expertise and that the global north is seen as ‘developed’ come in the way of questioning ‘development’, let alone addressing questions of resistance and democracy in relation to environmental interventions (Arora-Jonsson, 2017, 2018). Arora-Jonsson (2017) shows that the tendency to treat social and political issues as technical matters makes it harder to question the underlying assumptions made by policymakers, not least in the Global North where the professionalism and expertise of state institutions are seldom questioned. Swyngedouw (2011, 2014) argues that it is these processes of bureaucratisation and transforming the ‘political’ into ‘politics’, that is, constraining a free political debate in favour of formalised politics that constitutes depoliticisation. This insight is important for the political discussion about sustainability, as it suggests a need to be attentive to contested meanings on sustainability and when the governance of natural resources is reduced to technical issues. In the analysis below, I show that these processes in local mining politics *within* the municipality maintain the current dominant position.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Sustainability is a temporal concept and connects present practices to the future, that is to say, how we use natural resources today impacts the potential for a sustainable future. This suggests that the question of time is important for the ways in which informants make sense of events. Therefore, I have been attentive to how research participants make sense of political events by drawing on both history (e.g., a history of colonialism or industrialisation) and the visions of the future (e.g., talking about economic development/decline or promises made about future prosperity). I take inspiration from Haikola and Anshelm (2018) on mining in northern Sweden and their analysis of how expectations relating to mining projects are formed. Second, I draw on work that argues for the use of ethnographic methods when studying policy and bureaucracy in order to understand how these are maintained through everyday actions (Mosse, 2005; Newman, 2020; Newman & Clarke, 2018) As Fischer et al. (2015) suggest, this means paying attention to contrasting official statements and policies, compared to the actual practice of politicians and bureaucrats, but also to identify the work that policy texts do to maintain (or subvert) a political line.

The fieldwork that forms the basis for this article was conducted in the Storuman municipality for in total of 5 months based on recurring visits between April 2017 and March 2020. I made a selection of interviews, policy texts, newspaper articles and participant observation. In all, 21 people were interviewed; 13 with municipal politicians across the whole political spectrum and eight with civil servants working in positions that dealt with issues of planning, environmental management, property and demography. Perspectives from the municipal administration are unfortunately lacking interviews with the office for enterprise and businesses, as the planned

interviews had to be cancelled due to unforeseen events (out of the author's control). To remedy this, particular attention was given to interviews with politicians who work in close connection with the office, as well as an analysis of documents issued by the office.

Nine of the interviewees were women and 12 were men. While the politicians' educational backgrounds varied from vocational training to higher education, all the civil servants had received higher education. In addition to the research participants from the municipality, I include three interviews with people who are official stakeholders in the permitting processes and have in the past criticised municipal practices. These three interviewees serve to provide parts of the background for the article. All interviews were semi-structured. The research participants have all been given fictional names. However, as the study is conducted in a sparsely populated area and all respondents have public positions, anonymisation is hard to achieve. To take this into consideration, all research participants were made aware of how the interviews would be used in the research.

The initial interview selection was made on the basis of the individual being in a position with direct contact with administering mining permits. I increased the selection by 'snowballing' from the initial interviewees for new research participants, in part by enquiring who they thought I should talk to and in part by asking about particular administrative responsibilities, for example, property and land management. Furthermore, I have regarded the interviews as expressions of the individual interviewee's beliefs. The interviewees were made aware of the background of my research in general, explained as an interest in how the three mining projects are perceived by the informants and what they think they mean for the local communities. This was done so that all interviewees would have the same level of understanding about what my entry point to the field was and how their responses might be used. When prompted, I disclosed my own position regarding mining in Sweden, which I described as being cautiously but not categorically critical of new mining projects and the national mining policy.

As a complement to the interviews, I carried out participant observations at public meetings and spent time in the municipal offices and had lunch or informal meetings with the municipal staff. During these observations, I participated in conversations, discussed my research project and made field notes. Apart from the informal meetings, I also attended two public council meetings and one closed meeting with the planning committee for Indigenous interests.

The municipality has issued three publications on the socioeconomic effects of mining investment (Duvdahl, 2012; Lindahl et al., 2016; Umander et al., 2018). These were referred to in the interviews and seemingly remained relevant in planning procedures and public discourse. Likewise, the mining companies themselves produced material to promote the local and national benefits of their projects. These reports (*ibid.*), together with local news and editorials, are analysed in relation to the interviews and practices observed on the ground. A comprehensive list of the written material can be found in Appendix A.

Three mining projects in Storuman

Like most northern Swedish municipalities, Storuman has faced a declining population since the 1970s (SCB, 2021). My interviews show that the population, and in particular taxpaying residents, remain a central concern for the local government. Fjertorp et al. (2013) argue that while an increase in population does not necessarily generate a stronger municipal economy, it does improve the local government's ability to maintain welfare services. This is also a key reason given in the interviews, aligning with the Swedish Mineral Strategy (2013), that mining initiatives will

generate jobs and sustain the local economy. However, Storuman's unemployment rate is lower than the national average, even when compared to the rates of larger cities such as Stockholm according to Statistics Sweden (SCB, 2021). According to a city planner at the municipality, finding people willing to move to remotely located Storuman, even for high-paying jobs, is the main challenge in the area.

Actual mining activities in Storuman are comparatively recent and few, in relation to the heavily mined municipalities immediately east. The first operational mine within the municipality was a gold mine that started in 2005. The gold mine is now depleted, but according to the Australian owner, Dragon Mining (2015), the company is exploring adjacent sites for further extraction. Between 2008 and 2012, two other mines opened only to be abandoned as the mining companies declared bankruptcy. These now infamous mines, Blaiken and Svärträsk, and their negative impacts on the environment³ as well as their failure to provide secure employment and pay their bills, have negatively affected municipal residents' views on mining. The three mining within this study projects consist of a nickel project in the valley of Rönnbäcken, owned by the Swedish company Bluelake Minerals, a fluorspar project outside the village of Blaiken/Ersmark at a mountain called Kyrkberget, owned by the British company Tertiary Minerals, and finally a gold mine project pursued by the US/Canadian company Agnico-Eagle located outside the village Barsele. During fieldwork, only the Agnico-Eagle project was operating. The Kyrkberget project had appealed to have their permits re-instated, while Rönnbäcken remained at a standstill since 2016.

The three mining projects in municipal politics and administration

In recent years, mining politics in Storuman have mostly revolved around the three potential and the two abandoned mines. Here, I lay out the background to the new projects, but I also show how the projects have been drawn into municipal politics, in part through the actions of citizens but also by the municipality taking an active stance on the projects.

During fieldwork in April 2018, environmental officers in the municipality explained that Agnico-Eagle had weekly correspondence with the municipal administration, while the other two projects led a relatively quiet existence. This was not always the case. Since 2008, the Rönnbäcken project, then owned by the company Nickel Mountain Resources, was the cause of much controversy and led to the formation of the Stop the Mine resistance network in Rönnbäcken that took on international proportions (see Persson, 2015; Stiernström & Arora-Jonsson, 2022). Storuman municipality is located in Sápmi, the traditional homeland of the Indigenous Sami people, whose livelihoods and culture are tightly connected to their access to land, and the resistance network organised a large part of the Sami population (ibid). During the conflict, the municipal leadership adopted a firm pro-mining stance, with promised investments and the potential of an increase in the population due to work-related migration given as the main reasons (Tidholm, 2014, pp. 40–62; Müller, 2015, pp. 228–230). The different positions of, for and against the mine led to tensions both within and outside of the municipal government. However, in 2016, the Rönnbäcken mine came to a halt (in part due to the protests) and has remained dormant until spring 2021 when it came under the name of Bluelake Minerals. Since then, the new owners have been attempting to revive the project.

The stance taken by the municipality shows that a municipal administration can and does move beyond the formal permitting process (described in full in Appendix B) to influence the implementation of mining. Furthermore, in 2012,⁴ Storuman municipality published the report

Investment effects in Storuman Municipality 2015–2030 (Lindahl et al., 2016), written by external consultants, outlining the potential benefits of investments where mining was a substantial part. The report formed the basis for a glossy magazine named *Storuman Tjugo20* [Storuman twenty20] (Duvdahl, 2012), with interviews depicting a bright future of sustainable development for Storuman, although the magazine also contained views that suggested that the path towards the future would be complicated and would entail conflicts. In the magazine, sustainability is depicted by a range of aspects such as a long and enjoyable life, economic prosperity and environmentally sound use of resources. However, all these aspects were dependent on investment capital flowing in to the municipality through activities such as mining.

The municipal government also participated as a partner in the project Regional Innovation in the Nordic Arctic and Scotland, an EU-funded project for regional development through ‘smart specialisation’, a method of identifying and utilising (underdeveloped) municipal resources (Jungsberg et al., 2020). In Storuman, one of the identified resources was minerals. These elements, taken together, reveal how the municipality has taken a strong position to favour mining projects. At the same time, the leadership like to create the appearance of being part of an apolitical planning process. In the next sections, I will contrast this position with the role of politicians and civil servants in municipal mining politics.

Sacrifice, survival and development in local mining politics

In the interviews with politicians, their support or opposition could broadly be identified as one to three positions. First, some respondents were completely opposed to the projects, connecting them to neo-colonialism and environmental destruction. Second, some emphasised the benefits that might come from mining investments. However, placing themselves somewhere in between these positions, there were a diverse group of politicians who presented themselves as being pragmatic. Their positions are more blurred but can be further divided into those who regarded the mines as a necessary evil, and those who saw them as bringing potential benefits, but only under certain conditions.

Opposing the mines

In March 2019, I met Peter who represents the Left party in Storuman Municipality. Speaking as a member of a Sami community as well as a politician, Peter described the mining projects as recent examples of neo-colonialism, perpetrated by the Swedish state in the northern inland and in Sápmi. Most typical is the case of Rönnbäcken. Peter explained that the mining project is targeting a river valley that has a history of living with the Swedish state’s resource extraction, particularly during the development of the system of hydro-electric power plants that reshaped many rivers of the northern inland.

The [general] feeling among the people around here is that when the state wants something, they just come here and take it. [...] You just take what you want. Meanwhile, [we] see how welfare services disappear at an increasingly rapid rate. (Peter, 2019)

Peter expresses a sense of the northern region being a smorgasbord for the Swedish state, a notion that was largely shared across the political spectrum. Caroline from the Social Democrats, the

largest oppositional party to the Center-Right coalition that rules Storuman, was critical about state politics that promoted predatory behaviour from the mining industry. ‘They come here and pillage and give nothing back’. In this, she is close to what Maria, a liberal-conservative politician and member of the Sami Parliament told me.

I used to work in the Blaiken mine [...] so I’ve seen the consequences [...] Everyone is affected, the impacts on the land are huge[...] We who live here, and enjoy living with nature, notice how the land gets smaller and smaller [...]. The rest of Sweden lives of our resources and we get nothing for it. (Maria, 2020)

In these descriptions, the imagery of the ‘sacrifice zone’ as a place utilised and later discarded for the benefit of some place elsewhere (Dale et al., 2018; Skorstad et al., 2018) is strong. Interestingly, while this sentiment was echoed in social movements against the mines, such as the *Stop the Mine Network* in Rönnebäcken, it had not led to any stronger coalitions or party positions within municipal politics. While the Left party has been a staunch critic of mining and many of its members were part of the resistance moment against the Rönnebäcken mine, the other party representatives described the mining project as existing outside of or away from municipal politics.

When I later asked Peter why the protest was limited to the resistance network, he told me that the people living in the northern inland have long since learned that protests take you nowhere, so instead they assume a position of stoic endurance (cf., Stiernström & Arora-Jonsson, 2022). The interviewees also shared a sense that it does not matter if they protest due to them being so few in comparison to the external interests exerting pressure on them. Their explanation shows a sense of voicelessness, that connects to a notion of being both left behind and sacrificed for external interests. The stability of municipal politics regarding mining in Storuman can be compared with recent developments regarding often quite successful mobilisation against mining investments outside the confines of municipal politics, where even local governments have been involved (Anshelm & Haikola, 2018).

A pragmatic position: Mines as a necessary evil or conditional benefactors

Krister from the Christian Democrats is a member of the municipal council. He agreed with the image of northern Sweden being internally colonised but argued that the utilisation of resources is inevitable and therefore something that cannot be disregarded in local politics. In the event of a mine opening, he saw that there might be economic benefits like employment leading to an increase in revenue. He also wondered what would happen to Storuman if there was no extraction of resources. By doing so, he suggested that, although he would prefer alternative solutions, the mines represented a path of survival through sacrifice. Eva, a representative of the Swedish Democrats, continued with this logic, when she argued that although the mines bring with them many complex problems, not least environmental ones, the mining projects also represent means to a future existence. Both Krister and Eva explained that since society at large is dependent on mineral extraction, perhaps there is also a moral obligation to accept the presence of mining projects. Here, the respondents depict Storuman as a sacrifice zone but also highlight how this sacrifice can be considered part of the larger pursuit of sustainable development that provides a means of survival locally.

The view of the municipal leadership was clarified in interviews with Adam, the chair of the municipal council and member of the liberal Center Party. He described his stance on mining

as optimistic, provided that the companies passed the national permitting processes. The mines might deliver new job opportunities and thereby create municipal economic growth, both through the influx of residents, but also through an increase in revenue through labour taxes (cf., Fjertorp et al., 2013). He argued for a pragmatic approach, asking how they might best benefit from a situation wherein the municipality had little sway. Adam actively supported the mines by attending a yearly conference in Stockholm, where the municipality organised mining investment seminars. Adam also represented the Swedish Municipalities' interests in the SGS Advisory Board, set up by the Swedish Geological Survey. This places him in a network of public servants, mining industry representatives and politicians, which he then could draw upon to push his political position (cf., Olsson & Hysing, 2019). In Adam's position, opening mines does not signify a sacrifice as long as the mines adhere to the current environmental requirements. Rather, he regards them as a solution to the problems induced by being left behind, that is, the lack of funds needed for municipal development. Seeing them as a solution to these problems has also encouraged Adam to act to realise the mines.

When Tertiary Mineral's permits were withdrawn from Kyrkberget based on an appeal to the Mining Inspectorate,⁵ Adam, upon the mining company's request, wrote a letter to the national government describing the long-term social and economic benefits the mine would have and signed it as chair of the municipality. In the letter, Adam equates the mining projects with sustainable development but does not explain how this connection is made, preferring instead to talk about the economic benefits that can be made from mining investments. To him, and similarly to the *Investment effects in Storuman* report, the mines were an untapped source of economic development. Through the letter and his placement in a government network that advises on mining development, Adam shows that he is willing to go beyond the cautious optimistic stance to make mining projects become a reality.

The letter from the chair of the municipality was not available in the public archive in Storuman, to the surprise of the municipal secretariat. When I had the opportunity to ask him about the letter, he explained that it could be seen as an expression of the established political line of the municipality. He described the formal position as only being prudent, presenting the push to move the projects forward as mostly an administrative task. Still, Adam acknowledges that the projects are controversial and claims to understand the points raised by critics, for example, the resistance network in Rönnbäcken. He even accredits them an important function in mining proceedings, describing them as a safeguard that can minimise the social and environmental impacts of the mining projects as they voice concerns that might be otherwise overlooked. This is an acknowledgement of the existing conflict and the politics involved, but it also reduces the resistance network to a functionary in the formal permitting process, whose calls to have their (Indigenous) rights acknowledged are reduced to environmental concern, thus depoliticising them.

Mines as opportunities

Johnny, of the local party The Municipal List, held a more utopian view on mining when he suggested that the employment opportunities in the mines will generate an increase in population of up to a thousand new municipal residents. His own estimate was far greater than anything suggested by the mining companies and would mean a boost for municipal revenue, although he did reflect on the precariousness of mining investments, (cf., Poelzer & Ejdemo, 2018), and he was critical about the Rönnbäcken mine due to (as he saw it) the low quality of the mineral

deposit. However, for Johnny, all industrial investments (from wind power to mines) that may generate new taxpayers should be welcomed as they will secure the economic development of the municipality. His positive view of the mines went even further than the cautiously optimistic stance promoted by the municipal government. Although he thought that the municipality could do more to ensure mining investments, he supported the descriptions of the mines as potential boosters of the local economy, made by the municipal leadership.

The account made by Johnny regarding the untapped potential of mining in parts comes with the urgency of economic survival. He appeared driven by an idea that something must be done to safeguard the future existence of communities in the rural North. Both he and Adam present themselves as pragmatic realists, willing to do what it takes to achieve sustainable development. Here, sustainable development is interpreted as being primarily economic, although it will also support social sustainability. In this, they also push back against critics of the mining projects and the current political line. Consequently, being against specific mining projects in Storuman meant opposing sustainable development, as the mining projects were viewed as engines that would power sustainable growth in the municipality. Adam, through his actions, attempted to secure the pro-mining position, and in his role as chairman, he presented this position as the established line of the municipality. Each in their own way does work to depoliticise local mining politics, in part by dismissing concerns raised by the opposition and in part by downplaying the role of municipal decision-making in permitting processes while supporting the mines.

In our discussions, Adam asserted that preparing for the implementation of the mining projects is only a 'rational' response to a process over which the municipality has little sway, and this places limitations on the actions a municipality can take in relation to the mining projects. Acting in other ways, such as opening up the question for debate, is constructed as being non-realistic. Thus, voicing concerns can be construed as making emotional arguments that are not as valid as those that are 'rational'. Adam gives the example of public referendums, a tool that he thinks of as strengthening local democracy but that he also considers a double-edged sword as one can never be sure if the citizens vote based on knowledge and information or if they are led by their emotions. Mining, in this perspective, appears as an issue that is too technical for local deliberative democracy (cf., Dannevig & Dale, 2018).

Expertise and pragmatic planning in the municipal administration

Depoliticising mining through pragmatism and reiterating the limited power of local government was also prevalent when the municipal administration planned for the future. In this section, I will turn my focus to how the mining projects appeared in planning procedures and public meetings.

In an interview with two civil servants, Olof and Carl, I began to sense that the complex views among the politicians also permeated the administration of the municipal government. Both described a one-way flow of resources from the northern inland to the central power in the south of Sweden and a process of enrichment carried out by both state-owned and private companies. When I interviewed Carl, who held a key position in the administration as a planner, he explained that while he felt frustrated about the imbalance of power, he believed that the municipality needed to be 'realistic' when dealing with mining projects. For Carl, being 'realistic' meant two things. First, limited power over the permitting processes and lack of resources in the municipality meant that mining projects were beyond municipal capacity. Second, realistic meant that the municipality nevertheless had to plan for the possibility that the mines might open, building houses, planning for infrastructure, setting up services and so on. From the perspective of the civil

servant, Carl saw this type of planning as a non-political task, a way of preparing for the future. But his statement also lays bare a space for deliberate action where the municipality does have some influence over the mining projects: the creation of a suitable infrastructure and a welcoming political climate for the mining projects. As shown in Appendix B, municipalities in Sweden are responsible for societal planning. During the interviews, this planning was described mainly in terms of reacting to plans made by the mining company.

The restraint of formal procedure and pragmatism put on the municipality exemplifies the sense of inevitability described by Newman and Clarke (2018), when politicians argue that there is only one solution to a problem. Here, I make a parallel to Syssner (2014) who points out that loyalty to a certain policy practice might hide opportunities to do things differently. Via processes of planning and pragmatism, mining is not a question about sustainability or even survival but administration, which can only be handled by those with the right resources and expertise—and in extension those with the right scientific credentials (cf., Mitchell, 2002). This is a situation that does not open up for political debate, and in fact, as I will show below, it can be used as a tool to subvert attempts to repoliticise mining.

When I attended a municipal public forum, I witnessed the denying of a motion made by a politician who wanted to adopt a municipal stance against the decision to withdraw the concession permits for the Kyrkberget mine. In his motion, the politician Erik wanted the municipality to take a clearer pro-mining stance, ensuring future employment and to see that the municipality did not miss out on the possibilities accompanying the mining enterprises. By taking a pro-mining stance, it might seem that he was declaring his support for a strengthening of the current policy. Instead, it soon became apparent that this ‘pragmatic realist position’ placed limits on any attempt to re-politicise mining.

Erik argued that all the politicians who were against the mines should return their government-issued tablets and smartphones, as none of them would be possible without the mines. He claimed that all who used such technology should also be in favour of opening mines; otherwise, they took a stance for environmental injustice and were hypocritical by virtue of not being willing to face the consequences of their personal mineral use. His motion was denied by the assembly after the municipal leadership made clear that it was outside of the municipality’s responsibilities. However, before the vote, the Left party made a point that one should always be wary of new mines and the promises that are made by the mining companies. The party member asked Erik to remember the mines in Blaiken and Svärträsk and that it is not the place of the municipality to go against an environmental impact assessment carried out by the county administrative board (CAB; see Appendix B), if it suggests that a mine posed a threat. The meeting then proceeded with other topics.

In this short episode, two things become apparent. First, the denial of the motion was in part based on the limited responsibilities of the municipality on mining permitting issues. Second, while this exchange partially opens up mine establishments for debate, it was the Left, who have been adamant in their resistance to the Rönnbäcken mine, who depoliticised mining politics in the municipality by referring to the expertise of the CAB, rather than formulating a rebuttal to Erik’s argument. When I later interviewed Erik, he expressed frustration over how mining was kept out of political debate. Apart from his wish for debate, Erik also pointed towards the importance of sharing and discussing knowledge about the mines and so emphasised the need to address both facts and opinions on the matter. While he was certain that his view would persevere in the end, Erik expressed a wish for increased participation in mining procedures. What Erik’s statements point to is how the hegemonic position that signifies municipal mining politics limits participation in political deliberations, making mining less political.

Between sacrifice and development in municipal politics

As I carried out interviews, it became apparent how across political parties and governmental offices, politicians and civil servants had assumed a critical position vis-a-vis mining. They argued that resource extraction under current national legislation was not well suited to generating wealth and social stability for the municipality (e.g., increasing the municipal population in order to generate revenue that will support welfare services). Politicians and public servants alike described living in a peripheral region where mining was viewed as an activity that repeated a long history of extractivism, where natural resource extraction was carried out to generate wealth elsewhere. As is shown above, this understanding of mining could be further divided into partly overlapping positions, ranging from those who viewed it as a neo-colonial practice with no benefits to those who presented themselves as pragmatics, trying to see the benefits of receiving at least some 'development' in an unjust system. In the latter group, people were in favour of the project, at the same time expressing feelings of being taken advantage of. Regardless of the position, there is a shared understanding of being left behind. This for some led to compliance to sacrifice in municipal politics. The development of a sacrifice zone was also understood as a way of taking responsibility for a global need for metals. Thus, the mining projects simultaneously become connected to ideas of sustainable development through mineral extraction on a global scale and a means for development or at least survival through sacrifice locally.

A second finding from the interviews was the relatively limited attention mining projects received by local politicians. In my discussions with politicians, it became clear that most of the parties had not established a coherent party line regarding the projects. This did not appear to be an issue for local political debate. Rather, it was understood as a routine administrative task for the public administration to handle, if regarded as an issue for the local government at all. When I enquired about the limited debate across the parties, politicians returned to the fact that they have little formal influence over the permitting processes. While they had plenty of ideas about which projects, they were in favour of (if any), influence over the extractive industries seemingly remained out of their grasp. This understanding can be contrasted with the heated and (to a certain degree) successful resistance movement that mobilised around the Rönnebäcken mine, where the mine became a matter for international debate (see Stiernström & Arora-Jonsson, 2022). This shows that outside of municipal politics, mining remains highly politicised.

Although mining projects rarely came to the fore in political debates in the municipality, both politicians and civil servants felt strongly about the proposed projects. The mining projects were both (and sometimes at the same time) presented as a continuation of how the rural North was sacrificed for the prosperity of urban, southern Sweden, and as a pathway towards local development and sustainability.

CONCLUSION

Taken together, limited formal influence in mining proceedings, the promise of economic development, a history of the futility of resisting colonial practices and the perception of an existence as the result of resource extraction (cf., Sörlin, 2019) gave mining projects a sense of inevitability in local politics. The mining projects connected local development politics and survival to 'green transitions' as evidenced in this research. Both the local pursuit of development and a feeling of taking responsibility for the minerals needed for the 'green transition' generated a sense of compliance to sacrificing the local environment. Thus, the mining projects came to be understood as enterprises

where national and even global interest in creating a ‘greener’, more sustainable society met with local needs of investments and capital for development. At the same time, outside of the confines of local government, the mining project in Rönnbäcken was (and still is) the subject for a national protest movement. While this did generate conflicting positions in municipal politics, the connection between mining and development remained strong, and even though there was critique against the mining projects, they were still regarded as a necessary evil among the politicians. The resilience of the bond between mining and development within the local administration was based on the idea that ‘sustainable development’ was modern and represented progress and growth. I have shown how this points to the importance of being mindful, not only to how ‘sustainability’ is used to motivate increased resource extraction (cf., Kirsch, 2010) but also to the fact that we must investigate how sustainability and development are used to generate compliance, especially at a local level. Behind words such as rationality and prudence, the space for municipal governments to steer formal permitting processes was downplayed. At the same time, there existed an understanding that ‘something has to be done’ about the lack of economic development, wherein the mining projects became viewed as (un)welcomed solutions.

This research has shown how local history (also described as colonial history) fostered a view that ‘development’ meant sacrifice. Connected to a largely shared view of regional history, there seemed to be a similarly shared understanding among politicians: being part of a peripheral region of the nation, often constructed as being ‘left behind’ or ‘in need of development’ in national politics (cf., Arora-Jonsson, 2013). While respondents differed in what they thought that sacrifice might lead to, ranging from environmental disaster and social suffering to economic prosperity, mining projects were united in an idea of what could be called ‘development through sacrifice’ wherein Storuman became viewed as a sacrifice zone. In this case, the sacrifice made is an environment irrevocably transformed by the mines, in return for potential economic gain, but it also signifies a place where the local effects of the grand project of green transformation unfold.

In light of recent research that shows the rise of mining in Europe (del Marmol & Vaccaro, 2020), and in a context of decreasing societal dependency on mineral imports, as well as the pursuit of green transition, we can expect an increased pressure on rural areas, which begs the question how mining is perceived and motivated not only from above but also from below. The present study shows that concepts such as sustainability and development can be highly contested and given different meanings at the local level, and, at the same time, this contestation can be hidden by an apolitical veneer wherein ‘sustainable development’ comes to mean ‘that which must be sacrificed’.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There are no conflicts of interest associated with this article.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹The dominant party in the Swedish coalition government between the 2018 and 2022 elections.
- ²The statement signaled an attempt to break with the 8 years that the Social Democrats ruled with the Green Party in a national government where the political discourse on mining was ambiguous and marked by internal conflict (Envall, 2018).
- ³For more information on the mines see SGS (2021a, 2021b).
- ⁴A second edition of the report was released in 2016.
- ⁵The role of the Mining Inspectorate is outlined in Appendix B.

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APPENDIX A: TEXT MATERIAL

News articles:

Published: 9th November 2013, <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/gruvan-intervju>

Published: 11th July 2014 <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/regeringsbeslut-om-gruvdrift-rattsprovas>

Published: 15th July 2014 <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/kritiken-mot-gruvplaner-vaxer>

Published: 31st October 2014 <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/renagarna-forlorade-igen>

Published: 13th November 2015 <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/krav-pa-gruvbolaget-avveckla-tillstanden>

Published: 17th May 2016 <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/kanadensisktforetag-storsatsar-i-barsele>

<https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/6701302>

Published: 17th January 2019 <https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/7133913>

Published: 11th February 2019 <https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/7153100>

Published: 29th September 2019 <https://www.svd.se/sluta-hyckla-om-metallbehovet>

Published: 12th November 2019 <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/vasterbotten-mecka-for-mineraljagarna>

Published: 7th December 2020 <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/vasterbotten/fn-s-uppmaning-till-sverige-om-ronnbacksgruvan-gor-om-gor-ratt>

Webpages and Social Media:

Agnico Eagle, Barsele project webpage, available at: <https://www.agnicoeagle.com/English/exploration/exploration-projects/barsele/default.aspx> [Accessed 26th April 2022].

Bluelake mineral webpage, Rönnbäcken projects, available at: <https://bluelakemineral.com/en/projects/nickel/> [Accessed 26th April 2022].

Investments effects in Storuman Municipality 2015–2030, available at <https://www.storuman.se/Nyheter/investeringseffekter-2015-2030/> [Accessed 26th April 2022].

Project report from ‘Regional Innovation in the Nordic Arctic Region and Scotland with a Special Focus on Regions with Large scale Projects’, Storuman, available at 2022-04-26 <https://www.storuman.se/Naringsliv-arbete/Naringsliv/Projektverksamhet/regina/> [Accessed 26th April 2022].

Social consequence of mining in Storuman municipality, Survey report, available at <https://www.storuman.se/Nyheter/rapport-fran-enkatundersokning-om-gruvdrift/> [Accessed 26th April 2022].

Stop the mine in Rönnbäcken webpage, available at: <https://stoppagruvan.wordpress.com/> [Accessed 26th April 2022].

Storuman Municipality webpage, available at: <https://www.storuman.se/> [Accessed 26th April 2022].

Storuman Tjugo20 digital magazine, available at: <https://issuu.com/forfuture/docs/tjugo20> [Accessed 26th April 2022].

Swedish geological Survey webpage, mineral resources, available at: <https://www.sgu.se/en/mineral-resources/> [Accessed 26th April 2022].

Tertiary Mineral webpage, Storuman project, available at: <https://www.tertiaryminerals.com/storuman-fluorspar-project-sweden> [Accessed 26th April 2022].

Vapsten Sitje webpage, available at: <https://vapsten.se/> [Accessed 26th April 2022].

APPENDIX B: THE MINING PERMITTING PROCESS

Permitting process

The permitting processes involves the following state agencies:

Mining Inspectorate (MI): The MI is the central agency for the administration and control of mining activities in Sweden. It offers support to mining companies and holds a substantial role throughout the permitting process. The MI is headed by the mining inspector. MI sorts under the Swedish Geological Survey, which oversees Sweden’s water and mineral resources.

County administrative board (CAB): The CABs represent the Swedish state on a county level. While being agencies in their own right, they have a close co-operation with national agencies (e.g., the Board of Agriculture) and execute policies on their behalf.

Environmental administrative courts (EAC): Courts that make rulings based environmental and societal planning legislation.

(Continues)

Step	Involved agency	
Exploration permit: This grants the exploration/mining company exclusive right to explore a specific area	MI	Throughout the processes it might be necessary to include other agencies (e.g., the Environment Protection Agency or the Ministry of Defence)
Possibility to apply for exploratory extraction permits or demands for special permits concerning Nature 2000 reserves	CAB and/or EAC	
Concession permit: Grants the mining or exploration company the exclusive right to extract minerals from a deposit. The company needs to prove that the deposit is economically viable for extraction and should include an environmental impact assesment (EIA). The application for a permit is sent for referral to the CAB who also contact the affected municipality(ies). Should the MI and the CAB reach different conclusions, or other stakeholders make a successful appeal the decision on the permit is moved to the national government	MI	
Environmental permit: Mining is by default considered an environmentally hazardous activity and must therefore show that measures have been taken to mitigate the impacts on the surrounding environment and communities. The mining company must provide an EIA, which must include a consultation with affected stakeholders and relevant government agencies (e.g., CAB). In most cases this include the municipality	EAC (can also include municipalities)	
Land allocation: The company applies to have land allocated for the purpose of extraction. This gives the company not only right to extract the mineral but to use the land above ground to erect the needed infrastructure. May include the municipality as a stakeholder	MI	
Construction permit: The company applies for a permit that allows them to erect the buildings and facilities needed to begin extraction.	Municipality	

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In this thesis I explore how potential mines shape rural places in times of transition. In recent years, mining has taken centre stage in development discourses, as what has been dubbed the 'green transitions' is putting increasing pressure on rural lands. Based on fieldwork in Storuman, a municipality in the North of Sweden, I ask questions about the entanglements between people and land and how resource extraction shape rural development in Sweden and beyond.

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SLU generates knowledge for the sustainable use of biological natural resources. Research, education, extension, as well as environmental monitoring and assessment are used to achieve this goal.

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