6 Approaching rewilding from different national historical contexts

A cultural rather than natural question

E. C. H. Keskitalo and E. Andersson

Introduction and aim

Much literature has noted that conceptions of the environment vary greatly between different states. Early conservation efforts often focused on conserving what were regarded as 'natural' environments as opposed to human ones (e.g. Purdy 2010). Such a juxtaposition of 'human' with 'nature' has eased, for instance in the recognition that many open landscapes with high biodiversity are the result of human use such as livestock grazing. Mainstream environmental protection today is thus often focused on biodiversity, including man-made features such as meadow landscapes created by grazing, and asserting a need to approach conservation as undertaken in relation to and with the inclusion of local uses (e.g. Antrop 2014).

Despite this multiple-use situation, a conception of environmental protection that has recently gained application is that of 'rewilding'. While this concept is understood in many different ways, the general idea of rewilding that will be discussed here focuses on creating, often large, areas without human influence or management, with wildlife-watching or tourism being the main accepted use there, in some cases added to by management that is considered to be complementary to wilderness, such as indigenous practices. In some cases, 'rewilding' has even aimed to reintroduce historical preindustrial or even Pleistocene conditions, targeting for instance the reintroduction of large vertebrates, particularly carnivores (Jørgensen 2015).

The concept of rewilding was applied first through activism and then in research, and is at present being applied widely: in the original United States (US) context, as well as in Europe within a European network founded in 2011 (Gammon 2017). In addition, rewilding cases across Europe have also been established in national networks (e.g. Gammon 2017; Hoek 2022; Carvalho et al. 2019). However, in Europe, there is a long history of cultural landscapes (Drenthen & Keulartz 2014), which highlights the importance of understanding their meanings and relations in various forms of management and policy initiatives (e.g. Müller 2011).

With a focus on conceptions of land and land use this chapter will analyse rewilding from a discourse perspective, by identifying and reviewing the

foundational tenets of the approach and tracing these back to literature on wilderness and the development of rewilding approaches and conceptions of wilderness in the US. Based on present literature and debate on rewilding, the foundational tenets are identified and reviewed with reference to the main areas of conflict and criticism within the academic discourse on rewilding, with a focus on Europe. The chapter then traces these conceptions to related ideas such as 'wilderness' that underlie a rewilding approach as based in a particularly US-centred conception of land use. Finally, in order to illustrate the ways in which the foundational tenets of understandings of something as 'wild' may differ from established land-use practice, the chapter compares assumptions about land use that are inherent in the concepts of rewilding and wilderness with those regarding land use in practice, policy and legislation in the European, and particularly the Swedish, case. In this, the chapter draws together established (but often kept separate) discussions on rewilding and wilderness – as well as an empirical case, land use in Sweden – and suggests future areas for research.

Understanding and analysing land-use discourses

How land can be managed and what decisions are made regarding mana-ging – or not managing – land are fundamentally a social and political issue. Land use and understandings of what legitimate use entails can fall anywhere between non-intervention and avoidance of management on the one hand and intensive management and use on the other, and subsequently between what may be seen as 'natural' and 'cultural' areas. However, this kind of distinction belies the fact that 'natural' areas are also impacted by culture: today in the Anthropocene, humans also impact ecosystems through far-away actions that influence climate, pollution and the like. Not undertaking management is also a social, cultural and economic decision (cf. Cronon 1996).

In such an understanding, there are thereby no human conceptions of eco-systems that are not 'cultural', meaning that it is of paramount importance to understand how and in what ways they have been formed. Understanding discourses can constitute a way to do this, as discourse study aims to highlight the boundaries of what can be talked about in a specific setting: what are the main tenets that people need to relate to, even if only to critique and contra-dict them? What areas are considered self-evident to have to relate to? In Foucauldian discourse analysis, answering these questions is regarded as archaeology, excavating what types of conceptions are prominent in a certain discourse (Foucault 1980; Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983).

Foucauldian discourse analysis has also highlighted the importance of tra-cing these types of tenets back historically – undertaking a genealogy – in order to elucidate where these specific ideas originated (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983). A major benefit of this is that it allows one to 'denaturalise' the types of assumptions that are often considered given in a specific context, and to show that they have developed in specific historical contexts with specific

assumptions and for specific purposes. Discourse analysis can thereby make it easier to pinpoint and criticise assumptions.

In this chapter, these ideas are applied as epistemological starting points (but, due to limited space, not as fully applied analytical methods), with a Foucauldian archeologically inspired approach aiming to highlight the main foundational, and criticised, tenets of rewilding. This aim is not to say that the approaches to rewilding that are highlighted here are taken in all work that relates to it; instead, the aim has been to highlight the main areas that have both been defined as crucial, based on foundational documents, and have received major critique in literature. The chapter does not aim to cover conceptions of rewilding beyond these, as the discussion of implementing rewilding has come to vary significantly between cases, in some cases also stretching to ideas of 'rewilding humans' and the like (e.g. Maffey & Arts 2023), which will not be discussed here. Instead, the aim is to identify and discuss key criticised areas of conceptions of rewilding. The focus in the criticism is placed particularly on Europe as an area of implementation. In line with this focus, the three main fundamental tenets identified here are 'Rewilding as returning land to its "natural" state'; 'Rewilding as excluding management'; and 'Rewilding as excluding general use'.

The key criticised areas of rewilding are then traced back in relation to historical development, highlighting the US in particular and in line with the development of the rewilding approach there. This analysis is inspired by that in Foucauldian genealogy, whereby key conceptions (such as here wilderness) are traced back to their specific historical origins of terms, conceptions and understandings. The focus here is placed on the academic analysis of the wilderness conception and major authors in this, and also includes some discussion on tourism as made relevant by the uses that are regarded as relevant to areas of rewilding in the foundational sense discussed here as well.

Finally, the chapter contrasts the conceptions discussed here with conceptions in practice, in the case of Sweden and with particular focus on forest. Sweden is chosen as a case because, contrary to much literature stressing the need for mainly local-level involvement in conservation (e.g. Pretty et al. 2009), it illustrates not only established local practices and land use but also the embedding of these at the level of national legislation, and thereby the relevance of the larger system level and organisation at this level in assessing different management approaches (e.g. Keskitalo 2024). Sweden is also relevant as a case as the relatively large geographic area covered by forest in this case may seem 'wild' to the outside observer. With agricultural land often having been seen as 'civilised' from a wilderness perspective (cf. Jahn 2013), the focus on forest thereby also illustrates the diversity of approaches to and uses of land that rewilding perspectives might otherwise conceive of based on a wilderness assumption. In relation to rewilding, Sweden may also be a relevant example not only hypothetically but also because one of the case areas within the Rewilding Europe network has been placed in Sweden (Koninx 2019).

Thus, while Sweden's case description, due to the general country level of the case, largely centres on a more general comparison, in practice the case could come to be influenced by the current rewilding discussion depending on the specific definition, selection and interpretation that are applied to rewilding features, either now or in the future. The case description is developed to relate to the areas that are made relevant in regard to the tenets of rewilding, i.e. the extent to which areas can be considered wilderness or natural, and the roles of management and use.

The main criticisms of the foundational tenets of rewilding

The description here of the main criticisms of the foundational tenets of rewilding focuses on rewilding as returning to land to its 'natural' state, rewilding as excluding management, and rewilding as excluding general use. All of these can be considered to be related to each other, based in the foundational conception of the term rewilding as it developed in the North American Wildlands project: focused on *wilderness exempting human influence, and often larger areas* (e.g. Jørgensen 2015).

Rewilding as returning to land to its 'natural' state

The concept of rewilding was first developed in the North American Wildlands Project, founded in 1991 with the aim of creating *core wilderness areas exempting human influence*. This conception thus highlights the intent for areas to be pristine, wild and outside human influence, which can be regarded as part of both this and the next main identified area, rewilding as excluding management. Areas are to be undisturbed, natural and left alone – outside human influence (e.g. Jørgensen 2015).

At this point, the concept of wilderness involved the presence of the large fauna that were still present there (Jørgensen 2015). However, in later applications – such as an influential *Nature* article in 2005 (Donlan 2005) – it was suggested that the rewilding of North America be based on a restoration of large vertebrates. Constituting the beginning of the popularisation of the concept, rewilding thus came to be seen as a return to a pre-clearance state, sometimes several thousand years ago and sometimes explicitly Pleistocene (Jørgensen 2015; see also Trouwborst & Svenning 2022). Some authors also specifically suggested that rewilding could become the new model of usage for abandoned agricultural land (e.g. Navarro & Pereira 2012). Prior to the development of the rewilding concept, this was also a central argument for a proposed Buffalo commons on the US Great Plains (Popper & Popper 1987).

As a result of criticism of these conceptions of returning to a 'state of nature', rewilding literature has later come to relate to conceptions of wildness as a more open concept than simply wilderness, as will be discussed later.

Rewilding as excluding management

The rewilding concept was taken further in both natural science and activist communities, for instance within activism with the 2011 establishment of the Rewilding Europe network. This network was based in the Netherlands – arguably Europe's most artificially supported environment – and the first European rewilding case study was established on *terra nullius* reclaimed from the sea floor (Gammon 2017). The Rewilding Europe angle combines the idea of species reintroduction with that of the use of abandoned land (Jørgensen 2015); however, this first case, from the Netherlands, which initially escaped criticism from existing users by utilising an area that lacked established use, drew major criticism as its human-introduced large herbivore flocks peaked and then starved to death during harsh winters (Lorimer et al. 2015; Kopnina et al. 2019). National rewilding networks, particularly in the UK in 2015, have followed and subsequently also garnered criticism, especially from existing users (Corlett 2016; Pellis 2019). This is because it is assumed that areas – as in both the Netherlands case and in the North American Wildlands Project – will be left outside human influence or management. This means that even if they were not 'wilderness' from the start, the management is assumed to be akin to one that will 'exempt human influence'; i.e., remove or lack management.

In response to criticism of this exclusion of management, later literature has highlighted that rewilding should be seen as emphasising non-human autonomy (Prior & Ward 2016). This reconceptualisation has taken place in parallel with a refocus on wildness, instead of wilderness, as a basis for rewilding. Thus, the purpose of materially realising pristine environments has shifted to instead acknowledging the plurality and diverse conditions of different spaces. This shift has meant that the initial emphasis on excluding management has softened to one that 'allows Rewilders to create "wild spaces" rather than wilderness', which highlights the agency and role of 'Rewilders' in this creation and management (Ward 2019).

Rewilding as excluding general use

Attempts to apply the rewilding concept in practice have drawn extensive popular criticism from multiple users, mainly in relation to its being ahistorical and unsuited to areas marked by established and multiple land uses. The focus on 'wild' areas that are 'outside human influence' is thus taken to the conclusion that it means that existing uses must be exempted. In this, the focus has instead been placed on uses of nature that are considered transient and could potentially be undertaken without implications on site, focusing on tourism as well as on uses that can be regarded as being related to a more 'original' nature, such as indigenous use (e.g. Koninx 2019). The criticism of excluding general use in such a way has involved all the three aspects of seeing areas as 'natural', excluding management, and excluding general use, potentially as all of these

have been seen to lead to social conflict. In the UK, where rewilding has been discussed for the last ten years or so, Gammon reports that UK 'farmers have defended their ways of life against [*Rewilding Britain* founder] Monbiot's attacks and the existential threat rewilding would pose' (Gammon 2017: 17; cf. Carey 2016). Authors have also noted that seeing rewilded areas as only an object of tourism and not allowing other land uses (except potentially indigenous ones, in areas where this distinction can be made) is not practicable (Koninx 2019). Bone, quoting *Europe Nature Trust*, notes that *Rewilding Scotland* into a 'tourist attraction' would be incorrect as it 'is not wild, rather it is rural … and converting [it back] … would require radical social change' (Bone 2018: 10; see also Martin et al. 2021, 2023 on illustrating how such critiques have also come to change which foundational aspects of rewilding are applied). Other authors have also noted that approaches that express these foundational tenets ignore the very understanding of 'landscape' as 'shaped land', and can be understood as being in line with a British historical enclosure of commons, excluding local use in favour of large landowners (Olwig 2016) and now instead favouring large and similarly economically important tourism interests (Büscher et al. 2012).[1]

The rewilding approach in this type of understanding has thereby been strongly criticised not the least in the social sciences, where authors have even regarded it as resulting in 'green wars' (Büscher & Fletcher 2018) or 'neoliberal conservation', as it is seen as removing land rights from the local population (Büscher & Fletcher 2015; Lansing et al. 2015; Büscher et al. 2012). Proponents and opponents of the concept have argued it out in multiple comment articles (e.g. Cafaro et al. 2017; Büscher et al. 2017).

Other critique has focused on the parts that are central in the original conception of rewilding, for areas to be 'wild' ('natural') and exempt from 'human influence' (i.e. excluding management and general use). Authors questioning the concept have noted that, for Europe, not only does an application of 'wilderness' 'lack … a common physical and spatial definition' (Lupp et al. 2011: 597); 'relatively pristine' or 'wilderness' areas may be considered to constitute only a few per cent of the European area (Schnitzler 2014).[2] Authors have also noted that the ecological benefits and feasibility of rewilding are in doubt (e.g. Nogués-Bravo et al. 2016). The rewilding movement has thus been criticised for enforcing a romanticist view of nature. For instance, it has been noted that:

> [t]he focus on 'charismatic' animals … tends to lend weight to the perception that rewilding may be motivated to some extent as much by the experience of spectacle or thrill-seeking as environmentalism … Such sentiments, it can be argued, are broadly consistent with the sensibilities that have long been associated with the tourist's search for 'authentic' experiences and, correspondingly, the contemporary urbanite's weariness with everyday experience; a search for romantic re-enchantment amongst a sector of society disenchanted with modern urban living and the

manufactured diversions of consumerism as much as the more laudable aims of restoring biodiversity

(Bone 2018: 11–12)

Thus, Gammon suggests that '[w]hereas in the North American context, rewilding seemed to emerge out of the conservation trends that preceded it, in the European setting, the rewilding departs significantly from the preceding protection regime' (Gammon 2017: 158).

Aiming to qualify a rewilding approach to the admittedly highly cultural landscapes of Europe, authors supporting the concept have suggested that the approach could be modified: applying existing management, acknowledging that Pleistocene environments cannot be recreated in present warmer and more infrastructurally developed areas, and focusing on rewilding in abandoned farmland or 'marginal' land (e.g. Pereira & Navarro 2015; Navarro & Pereira 2012).[3]

What conceptions are rewilding and wilderness conceptualisations based on?

As part of the criticism that the tenets of rewilding discussed above have drawn, there has also been a movement towards understanding it as being based in specific ideological and developmental assumptions. Along these lines, it has been noted that the conception of wilderness in rewilding 'reinforce[s] … a uniquely American paradox' (Carey 2016: 807) that may not reflect either actual or historic conditions, either there or elsewhere. This is because the lands that were conceived of as American 'wildernesses' were originally inhabited by indigenous populations, and thereby did not lack human influence – only an influence that the colonists would recognise (cf. Keskitalo 2024). Thus, it has been suggested that assumptions regarding rewilding in fact reproduce US historically based assumptions regarding land use that differ from European ones.

In tracing the major tenets of rewilding, the conceptualisation of 'wilderness' includes all the different aspects of seeing areas as 'natural' lands, excluding management, and excluding general use. This is because the idea of nature as a 'wilderness' makes it definitionally devoid of human influence (e.g. Carey 2016). 'Wilderness' is considered to describe areas before human influence – notably, before European influence. This conception has been reviewed in a wide-ranging body of literature, in which it is particularly referred to as being promoted by American thought (e.g. Nash 1982; Slotkin 1998). It has further been suggested that the US experience and understanding of nature cannot be understood as separate from its broader frontier experience of large-scale and historically protracted settlement (Slotkin 1998; Nash 1982), i.e. the specific historical circumstances that shaped this understanding of nature.

In practical implementation of these concepts, it has thus been criticised that the 1964 US Wilderness Act defines wilderness as an area 'untrammeled

by man' (i.e. excluding any human use or management), despite the fact that the land that would become the US was inhabited and used in multiple ways long before the arrival of British colonists (Wilhelm 2013). Researchers have concluded that this means that the US Wilderness Act's 'reverence of "wilderness" per se is grounded in an *aesthetic* – not some objectively verifiable state of affairs … [and] generally independent of any *local* … sensibility' (Colburn 2005: 457; cf. Purdy 2010, Lowenthal 2013; Moranda 2015). Today, US definitions of wilderness are further seen as revolving around roadlessness and the absence of human-built constructs (Wilhelm 2013).

Similar to the claim that rewilding is focused on romanticist rather than ecological aims (especially if the latter are understood in relation to biodiversity) (e.g. Bone 2018), authors writing on wilderness have also concluded that 'wilderness' involves something other than a factual state or conditions that are directly relevant to biodiversity (Gammon 2017). Seeking the conceptual roots of the 'wilderness' concept, authors have related the derivation of the word wilderness to being 'bewildered': lost and feeling astray (Gammon 2017). This understanding applied to nature has been considered to be a result of the significant role that the 'frontier' experience – of a 'civilisation' conquering 'wilderness' – has played in American thought and history (e.g. Slotkin 1998; Turner 1921).

Thus, in his classical work on wilderness conceptions in the US, Nash (1982) describes how settlers on the American continent depicted the land as Other to themselves – the settlers were seen as constituting 'civilisation' as a positive force, which was itself defined by its juxtaposition with nature or 'wilderness' (cf. Turner 1921). This was a historically and culturally coloured experience. While hoping for a bounteous Eden, US settlers had to confront their own inability or difficulty to gain outcome in this new, foreign land. This made them come to see wilderness as alien, inhospitable and dangerous rather than as naturalised and known surroundings, such as they might have conceived of nature in the lands they had left. When this experience passed, with more and more of the American continent coming under settler habitation and with 'civilised' agricultural or pastoral use, wilderness – still conceived of as Other – again came to be regarded as Edenic and as an object for preservation; but in the same mythical state that they had imagined it: free from human impact (and ignoring land uses present before their large-scale and agriculturally based colonisation; Nash 1982; see also Cronon 1996).

The understanding of land as 'wilderness' can thus be considered to be based more on a cultural conception and a self-understanding of US settlers than an actual or factual conception of properties of nature (e.g. Kaufmann 1998). It has further been noted that some of these conceptions can be traced back to the Roman Empire and early Christendom conceptions of the lands beyond the border of the Empire or monasteries as wild lands, populated by demons and angels (e.g. Lupp et al. 2011). This can be related to the Edenic or horrific assumptions regarding 'wilderness' that were applied not only in relation to US settlement but also in the romantic movement (Nash 1982;

Slotkin 1998; Lupp et al. 2011). However, the emphasis on a frontier experience and its juxtaposition of 'civilisation' with 'wilderness' has been considered characteristic of the US in the stress placed on it even into the present (for instance in US popular culture; e.g. Kaufmann 1998).

These types of ideas about wilderness have also gained wide spread through American influence. The understanding of tourism as one of the few legitimate uses of wilderness can be said to be related to the common conceptual basis of wilderness and tourism conceptions. Many authors highlight that the romanticisation of wilderness is common not only in the historical development of the conservation movement but also in tourism. Tourism garnered significant focus in the US Wilderness Act in regard to scenic properties (e.g. Purdy 2010; Moranda 2015) and in the romantic movement, which also constituted a basis for early landscape tourism. However, today's criticism, well established within the field of tourism studies, highlights that tourism reproduces the conceptions described above as related to a wilderness conception. Tourism thus often focuses on that which is considered exotic, or even removed in time: it is assumed to differ from the assumed tourist's more naturalised background as urban or modern (that is, 'civilised'), instead locating places of nature in a position related to a historical past and separate from human daily life (akin to 'wilderness'; cf. Howard 2016; Viken and Müller 2017). However, as noted above, this is not something that can be assumed to intrinsically characterise nature areas. Instead, both historical research and a more social constructivist understanding of nature relationships (e.g. Peeren 2018) highlight that nature in such understandings has been defined not in relation to its intrinsic characteristics but by how it was socially experienced, in a cultural and institutional setting, by certain communities at certain times.

Rewilding or wilderness, and the construction of people and places in conservation and tourism discourses, can thereby be seen and analysed as constructed, by reviewing the areas and groups in which they emerge and are expressed, and how they may relate to existing discourses at place (i.e. at the locations where existing conceptualisations and use may be different; cf. Keskitalo 2024).

Later work related to rewilding has highlighted and discussed the historical, colonial and cultural concept of wilderness (e.g. Ward 2019). While some scholars argue that wilderness should not be abandoned but rather needs to be situated 'within the context of a renewed, radical ecology committed to healing the nature/culture split and ending the war on the Other' (Plumwood 1998: 659), others emphasise that 'wild' spaces should be understood as being co-produced (e.g. Whatmore 2002) or even as attempting to decolonise rewilding, by distancing themselves and present practice from the concept of wilderness (e.g. Ward 2019). In this context, *wildness* rather than *wilderness* has been highlighted as the key value of rewilding and has been proposed in order to shift focus from, e.g., an imaginary space of purity and instead open up a possibility for co-production and interrelations between different entities. However, the discussion on wilderness and wildness in not new. In 1999,

Aplet asserted that 'wilderness is neither simply an idea nor a place. It is a place where an idea is clearly expressed – the idea of wildness' (Aplet 1999: 349). Similar to more recent discussion, Aplet stressed 'treating wildness as a quality best expressed in the places we call wilderness, but also infused in special places closer to home' (Aplet 1999: 349), which highlights the concepts' relevance in other areas and ecologies, such as cities (e.g. Owens & Wolch 2019). However, the term wildness still contains implicit historical cultural meanings based on the categorisation of the 'wild' as the Other and more fixed binaries (Whatmore 1999). Whatmore and Thorne (1998: 451) also stress that 'the designation "wild" seems not to have served its animal inhabitants well' within protection policy and management, highlighting their dependence on human desires and valorisation and the unsuitability of geographically and bodily fixating the wild.

The Swedish forest case

This conceptual analysis reveals that understandings of the environment may differ between national contexts and that the US case cannot be assumed to be typical of the human-nature experience in a more general sense. Instead, the Swedish case is potentially similar to many rural areas in Europe although potentially also standing out in the extent to which majority populations are involved in land use in areas that may from the outside seem 'wild'. The case thus highlights a contrast to all the main criticisms of the foundational tenets of rewilding: areas are not wilderness, they are managed and they are part of general use, as discussed below. There would thus be significant implications from carrying assumptions related to these tenets further in applications to land use and conservation.

Nature areas as part of culture, historically and today

Historically, nature use in Sweden and more broadly Fennoscandia was highly varied. It was not only defined by agriculture in thereby transformed or 'settled' nature areas (whereby nature and culture were distinguished in the US case) but also included the application of hunting, fishing and broader use rights across nature areas. The right of public access in Sweden and more broadly Fennoscandia is largely based on the traditional independence of farmers (Dahlberg et al. 2010). In this type of conception, nature is not made separate from or juxtaposed with human use but is rather a part of it. Thus, the concept of 'wilderness' has not gained application in the Fennoscandian languages, which have instead highlighted areas of use outside habitation and agricultural use. This is visible in historical concepts such as *utmark/erämaa*, which demoted land that was not under private ownership but to which use rights involving activities like hunting, fishing and the like were applied (e.g. Svensson 2016). Agricultural practice was thus historically never considered the sole expression of a right to land, and both preceding Sámi rights to land

for pastoralism or hunting practices and broader *utmark/erämaa* practices were acknowledged at the time that areas were included under the Swedish (then Swedish–Finnish) state, i.e. far before American colonisation and the spread of wilderness or frontier thinking (e.g. Svensson 2016; Beery 2011).

Areas were thus not conceived of as wilderness even in a historical sense; instead, conceptions like *erämaa* highlight the nature of their use. The early establishment of national parks in Sweden was inspired by conservation ideals from Germany and North America involving the preservation of wilderness for scientific, aesthetic and nationalistic reasons (Dahlberg et al. 2010), but was also highly interlinked with the democratisation of nature and the access and practice of outdoor recreation (*friluftsliv*) as part of the nationalist ideal (e.g. Beery 2011). A number of established civil organisations and the welfare state provided the foundation for the country's contemporary nature-inclusive cultural identity (Sandell & Sörlin 2008).

Such a multiple, institutionalised use of land manifests itself in Sweden and more broadly Fennoscandia even today, as the landscape is used by actors from forestry to reindeer husbandry, tourism and local recreation and use (rural population as well as to a great extent second-home owners), hunters, berry and mushroom pickers, mining, wind and water power, road and air networks, telecommunications and others. About two-thirds of Sweden is forest, which may seem 'empty' to the modeler who applies central European delimitations for habitation: 'there are only seven urban areas in Sweden with more than 100,000 inhabitants' (Nordlund et al. 2017: 167; cf. Ceauşu et al. 2015). However, these lands are not empty but are rather used for multiple purposes, by populations who may live on site as well as in urban areas while still maintaining their link to these areas. Land in Sweden is largely (about 50% of all forest land) owned by small-scale family forest owners, who – even when they do not reside on their land full-time – may have second homes there and actively manage their lands. Second homes are also a familiar feature to Swedes at large, among whom, similar to Norwegians and Finns, over half the population may have access to a second home (e.g. Pouta et al. 2006).

Nature areas as managed and part of general use

As noted above, a large part of Sweden is covered by forest. While this might seem 'wild' to the untrained eye, forest in Sweden today is generally managed. In this is included that most of Sweden's forest today is planted, and thus even forest that may look natural to the untrained eye has typically been both previously logged and planted. This means that ecosystems are not natural that they are pristine, but are instead managed; albeit often in relation to what species were naturally there and a high percentage of domestic trees. Plant material, however, is regularly engineered today and specific plant varieties are chosen for specific situations as well as with the aim of adapting to climate change (cf. Keskitalo et al. 2016). This has multiple implications for forest ecosystems, for instance in regard to which natural species thrive

and the degree to which the forest functions as a well-developed ecosystem (as socially debated, e.g. Laszlo Ambjörnsson et al. 2016), but all cases evidence the thoroughly managed nature of land.

While the use of forest for forestry is well established, other groups also have rights of use, even on private land. These different groups regularly come into conflict, and could thus be regarded as not only maintaining use rights but also limiting potential increased use by other interests (cf. Keskitalo 2008): a sort of conflict in uses that itself may serve to delimit increased use and thereby to some extent serve to protect existing land use. Much use of and access to nature areas is made possible by the Swedish right of public access, often regarded as typical of the Nordic countries and allowing free roam over even private land under a 'damage not' principle that nevertheless allows for berry and mushroom picking and the like (Thulin et al. 2015). Berry and mushroom picking is common, often connected to rural or second-home habitation, and in some cases has been assessed as constituting two-thirds of land's non-timber value (Mattson & Chuanzhong 1993; see also Turtiainen and Nuutinen 2012). This type of principle thereby supports the interest among many groups in maintaining nature areas. Reindeer husbandry – institutionalised in Sweden as an indigenous Sámi right with some exceptions for other populations but in Finland a right of all the country's population – constitutes another layer of rights, namely formal use rights to husband reindeer over large areas, including private lands (e.g. Keskitalo 2008).

Other prominent and well institutionalised nature uses are hunting and fishing – rights of Sámi groups in specific areas, these are also rights of landowners in general. Hunting is a well integrated social feature – historically even a 'majority culture' – that today is practised by about 300,000 people, or 3% of the population (von Essen et al. 2015; cf. Ljung et al. 2014). In this regard it has been noted that 'a feature of Swedish wildlife is the widespread distribution and proximity to public life, i.e., most wildlife species, herbivores, and predators alike are not confined to specific national parks or wildlife refugee areas but rather may be observed close to all major cities, on public, as well as private land' (Thulin et al. 2015: 652). Institutionalised as early as the thirteenth century, hunting has also been relatively widespread in Sweden, unlike in other parts of Europe where it was the purview of the elite: in Sweden all landowners gained hunting rights in 1789 and all tenants soon thereafter, and the still relatively powerful Swedish Hunting Association was established in 1830. Until the 1900s the moose hunt was a pivotal community event (some may say it still is today), and it is presently conceived of within a framework of 'wildlife care' with a goal of encouraging sustainable wildlife populations (*viltvård*; von Essen et al. 2015; cf. von Essen 2017). Fishing, and the wide availability of public fishing rights at low cost, make fishing a widespread nature use as well (Thulin et al. 2015).

In relation to these characteristics taken together, Sweden, like the Nordic countries at large, has also been said to be characterised by a great focus on outdoor recreation. As Margaryan notes, '[t]he majority of the Swedish

population frequently participate in a variety of outdoor recreation activities' (Margaryan 2016: 2–3). However, as these also include the practices discussed above, made possible by specific historical developments and presently encased in rights for nature use, authors have argued that the conception of this in the Swedish language (Swe. *friluftsliv*) is not possible to comprehend only through English terms such as 'outdoor recreation' (Beery 2011). Beery sees it as also including a common component of environmental consciousness or an attachment to nature (Beery 2011) and notes that, in a Swedish context compared to an American one, 'given enduring cultural elements in Norway and Sweden's wild places, nature may be better perceived as evolving a culturebased rhythm' (Beery 2011: 42). These types of differences between assumptions regarding land, particularly in historical US and Fennoscandian discourses, are further discussed in Keskitalo (2024).

With some relation to this, modern nature tourism in the Swedish case has thereby been characterised by its relation to multiple other land uses (Margaryan & Wall-Reinius 2017, Margaryan 2016). While in an international context Sweden has a great deal of nature and particularly forest areas with multiple uses, at the same time the country has a large tourism industry with actors at the national, regional and local levels, a significant nature component in its tourism, and identified potential for increasing the market in wildlife-watching tourism (among other things involving the 'big four' predators as well as moose as a tourism flagship species present there; Margaryan & Wall-Reinius 2017; Thulin et al. 2015). However, in the tourism industry the existence of these activities is typically regarded as being supported by the well developed infrastructure and interrelation with other multiuse industries in Sweden: extensive road, air and telecommunication networks (historically developed often by and for other industries, such as forestry or mining), extensive tourism facilities including hotel and other accommodation and lodging opportunities, and networks of guides and trails and the like that cater to the tourist and support local practices alike (Margaryan 2016). Nature use and 'wilderness' tourism in the Swedish case is thus enabled by rather than separate from significant human involvement, and indeed embeddedness, in supposed 'wilderness' areas.

Discussion and conclusion

Authors have concluded that 'there is a worrying lack of consensus about what rewilding is and what it isn't' (Nogués-Bravo et al. 2016: R87). There is also a growing discussion on the decolonisation of rewilding and its conceptions of wilderness, wildness and wild (e.g. Ward 2019). Along these lines, rewilding and wilderness approaches have been broadly criticised for those conceptions of land that focus on nature devoid of use; that is, exempting land use beyond tourism or viewing. The review of literature here illustrates that this can be regarded as an understanding based in highly historically and culturally specific experiences, particularly characteristic of the US one. Later

sections of the chapter illustrated conceptions that highlight the range of multiple uses that can be seen embedded in legislative, policy and local practice on not only local but also national level with regard to nature use in Sweden. The case also illustrates that forest, which has seldom been a focus in rewilding or wilderness discussions, cannot be conceived of either as 'wilderness' or through the agricultural lens with which wilderness is often constructed.

Most importantly, the case illustrates that conservation, restoration, rewilding and wilderness-related policy development, practices and activism need to be conceived of not in the abstract but instead in relation to their impacts on existing land uses and land areas that are far from empty and cannot be conceived of in their range of practices and interests based only on, for instance, the modelling of population density (cf. Ceauşu et al. 2015; Nordlund et al. 2017). This stresses the need for more holistic conservation approaches and alternatives that acknowledge and comprise social and political realities and choices (cf. Büscher & Fletcher 2019; Massarella et al. 2022), and that the 'wild'/'natural' in 'the "expert" re-orderings of these already inhabited ecologies in the networks of science, trading and governance, is a deeply political, and rightly contested, business' (Whatmore & Thorne 1998: 452).

This chapter thus suggests not only several areas that are relevant for more qualitative and culture-focused research on assumptions in conservation, but also the need to more broadly consider the varying institutional – legislative, policy and practice – contexts of nature use, and the different national or other understandings these are based in, rather than seeing them as given. Paying attention to the cultural conceptions inherent in understandings of wilderness, rewilding and related concepts can also serve to illustrate why proponents as well as opponents of, for instance, rewilding adhere to their arguments and do not meet in discussion: their assumptions regarding the use of nature will likely have been formed by different experiences and assumptions – such as national context or mirrored local assumptions – concerning nature and nature use, which will lead to varying positions in debate.

However, by conceptualising nature as an issue of culture – and, as in the Swedish case, a matter of local and national institutions of nature use rather than empty areas – it may also be possible to start questioning what conceptualisations may lead to a desired state. Here, the emerging multiplicity in rewilding and the conceptions of wild, wildness and wilderness must thus be clarified with an aim to be able to assess any possible consequences of the implementation of concepts. In this, unclarities regarding concepts may result in users reverting to the 'tough baggage' of wilderness as it has been embedded in discourses on areas. Thus, as Saunders, quoted in Beery, writes: 'We need a better understanding of the human-nature experience and a more compelling language to express what we value' (quoted in Beery 2011: 6–7).

Notes

1 These types of positions against or for a more integrated nature-culture view of nature in use, and one exempting human use beyond tourism, are also reproduced with regard to discussions on national park developments and nature-protection-related policies. Thus, while champions of rewilding have strongly criticised efforts that support natural-cultural developments (such as UNESCO's 2017 designation of a national park as an area of outstanding universal value; Gammon 2017), authors supporting such more integrated natural-cultural views have instead noted that forest cultural heritage, which is seldom protected and as a result has often been the subject of policies either favouring nature conservation or timber production, may be particularly vulnerable to shifts under a rewilding approach (Agnoletti & Santoro 2015).

2 However, given its increased attention, wilderness was nevertheless introduced as a policy issue with the 2009 passing of an EC resolution calling for increased wilderness protection. There are also various organisations that apply wilderness concepts (focused on wilderness rather than necessarily rewilding) in Europe, such as PAN Parks and Wilderness Europe (Jones-Walters & Čivić 2010).

3 However, authors such as these do not always distinguish between 'marginal' agricultural land, or land that is sparsely populated, and land that may be used by multiple interests but appears 'uninhabited' in large-scale modelling built on more urban criteria that omit smaller habitations (e.g. Ceauşu et al. 2015; cf. Nordlund et al. 2017). Nor are distinctions always made that note that land may be used in other ways than those involving agriculture (e.g. Navarro & Pereira 2015); and as a result, a broader understanding of the multiple policies, institutions and uses involving land has seldom been in focus to date.

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