Politicizing environmental governance: A case study of heterogeneous alliances and juridical struggles around the Ojnare Forest, Sweden

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Haikola, S., Anshelm, J., Wallsten, B., (2018), Politicizing environmental governance: A case study of heterogeneous alliances and juridical struggles around the Ojnare Forest, Sweden, *Geoforum*, 91, 206-215. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2018.03.003>

Original publication available at:

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2018.03.003>

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<http://www.elsevier.com/>

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Keywords: Environmental politics, mining politics, mining conflict,
environmental movements, environmental protest, environmental conflict,
depoliticization, neoliberalism

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Abstract

In this paper we use a case of resistance towards a proposed limestone quarry in Sweden to raise certain theoretical points regarding environmental politicization. Departing from ideas about depoliticization and neoliberal environmental governance, we first analyze the case in terms of scaling-up of the local conflict through actor alliances, discourse coalitions and through the juridical process. We then discuss how this case may indicate effective ways to politicize areas that have been depoliticized through neoliberal environmental governance. Most particularly, the chosen case highlights how depoliticization may be reversed through the politicization of the very channels through which depoliticized forms of environmental governance occur, here the juridical, formalized and nominally neutral processes of environmental planning.

Introduction

The historical development of liberal capitalism in relation to the environment can be described in terms of a double movement between ever-expanding resource extraction and a growing capacity for the state to technically administer environmental degradation (e.g. Beck, 1995; Frank et al., 2000). An important factor in the evolution of environmental protection has been a growing environmental awareness within civic society, which has put pressure on the state to impose regulation on its environmentally destructive activities. Neoliberal governance, often characterized as depoliticization, poses certain specific problems for environmental protection, as it tends to put a priority on the protection of private capital rather than public goods, while it delegates responsibility for the environment to formalized procedures of expert, technocratic management (Hay, 2007; Jessop, 2014; McCarthy and Prudham, 2004).

To understand the tension between neoliberal governance and the environment, and how environmental politics could be developed to progressively respond to socio-environmental problems, we need more empirical analyses of instances where neoliberal governance has given rise to socio-environmental conflicts and of the way resistance in such cases has been constituted (Hay, 2014; McCarthy and Prudham, 2004). As several authors have argued, depoliticizing forms of governance associated with neoliberalism tend to hinder environmental concerns from becoming subject to politicization, as the political potential in environmental issues becomes defused through technocratic processes that disallow underlying value conflicts (Goeminne, 2010, 2012; Kenis and Mathijs, 2014; Methmann and Rothe, 2012; Swyngedouw, 2011a). However, as McCarthy

(2013) argues, environmental concerns have also proven to be, and may yet prove to be, key to effective resistance to the deleterious effects of such governance.

In this paper, we report on an empirically grounded, exploratory investigation into environmental politicization and identify some theoretical points raised by the inquiry. We will focus on a case of resistance to mining where a process of extensive politicization around a planned limestone quarry occurred between 2005 and 2015. Many commentators regard this as the most significant environmental conflict in Sweden in decades (Klefbom, 2012). We argue that the way the issue was politicized through a historically unique alliance of rather unlikely actors points to certain crucial aspects of how the deleterious effects of depoliticized environmental governance may be countered through repoliticization.

We begin by briefly summarizing our theoretical point of departure as regards how neoliberal depoliticization works in relation to the environment and how politicization through mining conflicts has occurred in the 21st century. After a section on method, we present and analyze our case study. We conclude with a discussion of the lessons to be learned regarding the possibility of effectively politicizing the environment despite the negative effects of neoliberal environmental governance.

(De)Politicization and mining resistance

In presenting the theoretical background to this paper we focus on three points in the vast literature on depoliticization and politicization. The first is that depoliticization is a specific form of neoliberal governance that obscures the contestable nature of governing, that promotes consensus to the detriment of democratic disagreement, and that fortifies incumbent interests that stand to gain from the preservation of the supposedly “free” market paradigm (Burnham, 2014; Flinders & Buller, 2006; Hay, 2007, 2014; Jessop, 2014; Mouffe, 2006; Swyngedouw, 2011b; cf. Blüdhorn, 2014 and Fawcett and Marsh, 2014 about the specific relation to neoliberalism). Depoliticization is thus primarily to be understood as a way of governing in general, rather than an active process of making something that is political become un-political. It follows that the prefix in the term *repoliticization* is not to be taken as indicating by definition a preceding depoliticization of a once politicized issue. The repoliticization of Swedish mining that we describe in this paper occurs in response to the general depoliticization of environmental governance – as well as to the neoliberalization that triggers many of these mining conflicts - rather than in relation to a previous politicization of the specific issue of mining.

The second, related point, is that this diagnosis of deferral and obscuration should not be taken to mean that “politics” have disappeared, but rather that they have been moved elsewhere (Hay, 2014). With depoliticization, formal decision-making tends to be moved from official governments to formalized procedures of technocratic management that are based on ostensibly objective science and scientific consensus. This removes accountability for political decisions and makes them appear to be the result of common sense rather than something inherently contestable.

The third point is that this deferral may result in repoliticization as social groups that see themselves deprived of political influence act to reassert their political voice, or as depoliticized policies give rise to unforeseen consequences that may serve as politically mobilizing issues (e.g., Jessop, 2014).¹

It would be wrong to suggest that neoliberalism is inherently hostile to the environment. There have been many attempts to reconcile neoliberally oriented economic policies with efforts to mitigate society’s harmful effects on the

¹ The literature on “collaborative governance” (e.g. Emerson et al., 2011) can be seen as a theoretical complement to the depoliticization literature, as it instead highlights the possibility of diverse actor groups – public agencies, governments on different scales, actors from the private and civic spheres - working together towards a common goal in a constellation of dispersed power.

environment, most often under the influential heading of “sustainable development”. However, the very basis of liberal, free-market capitalism is the opening up of nature for commodification and resource extraction, and this is a process that neoliberalism is designed to facilitate. As such, neoliberalism can be said to harbor a fundamental tension between the dependence of moneyed interests on resource extraction, on the one hand, and interests devoted to environmental protection on the other (McCarthy, 2004). The depoliticizing process described above serves to smooth out and defuse these tensions through technocratic, consensus-promoting environmental management. However, the policies by which depoliticization occurs may backfire and result in repoliticization as different actor groups mobilize around environmental values to counter the extractivist logic dictated by the incumbent interests and raw materials-based capitalism that are served by neoliberal policies.

In the case of extractive industries, the 21st century has seen a globally occurring repoliticization in response to neoliberally ordered, depoliticized governance of mining that has been ongoing for the last decades (Bridge, 2004; World Bank, 2011). Neoliberalization of mining has been characterized by the facilitation of natural resource extraction through privatization, lowering of taxes, and easing of environmental regulation (Bebbington and Bury, 2013; Bridge, 2004; Bury, 2005; Krever, 2011; Liedholm Johnson 2010; McDonell, 2015; Naito et al., 2001; Otto, 1997; Warhurst and Bridge, 1997). The resistance to these processes has been directed against state-sanctioned intrusions by companies into sensitive environments, where local communities perceive themselves to be deprived of a voice and a positive stake in the project.

In her extensive review (2017), Conde shows that controversies surrounding extractive industrial projects in the 21st century have been characterized by *diversification*, a process that seems also to have been prevalent in other forms of environmental resistance in recent decades. This diversification plays out on three interrelated levels. First, resistances have become increasingly heterogeneous in their makeup, being constituted by groups of actors highly different from each other as regards values, social class, ideological orientation, and political affiliation (see also Dahlin and Fredriksson, 2017; Delina et al, 2014; Diani and Rambaldo, 2007; Hardt and Negri 2004; Saunders, 2008). Secondly, the strategies employed by these resistances have become more diverse, ranging from the very local (e.g. sit-in protests and physical blockades) to the international level, and from extra-parliamentary acts to resistance through the channels of formal institutions (see also de Rosa and Caggiano, 2015; Smith, 2001; Tarrow and McAdam, 2005; Perez et al., 2015; Dahlberg–Grundberg and Örestig, 2016;). Thirdly, resistances have become more translatable between different discursive frames as specific grievances are strategically connected to

similar claims or to more general issues and values that resonate among broader groups of people (see also Griggs and Howarth, 2004, 2008; della Porta and Piazza, 2007; Rootes, 2006; Saunders, 2007).

These three interrelated processes have led to resistance to extractive industries becoming less contained within the boundaries of the immediately local, despite their common denominator being the struggle against a specific project targeting a highly limited, geographical area. This shifting of scales is not without pitfalls as regards the sense of identity, credibility and political potency of the resistance. (See Rootes, 2007, 2008, for discussion of the trade-offs between the local “sense of place” and the policy influence that comes with successful scaling up of local conflicts.) There is much to be said for the importance of environmental resistances being able to reach beyond the local to gain a legitimacy that may be converted into concrete political gains. However, the tension between the local/particular and the supra-local/universal is a crucial dilemma not only for mining resistance but for all forms of environmental resistance. We shall return to this in the concluding discussion.

In this paper, we argue that the struggle against a limestone quarry in the Ojnare Forest, Sweden, can be seen as a case of environmental politicization where the diversification process of environmental and mining resistance movements has been taken to a new level. Our claim here is not that the Ojnare resistance is completely new or unique, but rather that it is a continuation of the diversification of environmental resistance, a resistance that occurs in response to a general depoliticizing movement in Swedish environmental governance. However, this process of diversification does create phenomena that are new to the Swedish environmental scene: new constellations of resistance actors, and new dividing lines between political parties. The most striking aspect of the Ojnare resistance is the degree to which it involves state agencies as active and crucial actors in the process of politicization (see further della Porta and Rucht, 2002, and Rucht, 2002, for discussions of the diversification and complexity of modern environmental protests). In the concluding discussion we will reflect upon the ways we believe environmental legislation is crucial for extensive environmental politicization of this kind.

Note on method

The analysis in this paper is based on material gathered from all major Swedish newspapers, the environmental press, and other relevant papers mentioning the Ojnare case. The conflicts and legal process surrounding the Ojnare Forest

limestone quarry were extensively covered in a wide array of media outlets, local as well as national. The press material is therefore well suited to a study of the strategies, actor coalitions, and discursive framings in play as the conflict unfolded. Given that the conflict played out over such a long period of time, there is a strong argument for the use of press material as it allows for access to the events close to the time they occurred. It should be noted that this is not a media analysis where we pay specific attention to how the media reports on the events covered. Rather, we use the media reports to access the actions and statements made by actors at the time. Apart from the press material, one interview was used to make a certain point in relation to depoliticized mining governance in Sweden.

Several researchers of protest movements have argued that media tends to prioritize certain types of events and actors, thus making analyses of social protests based on mass media reports unreliable (e.g. Doherty et al, 2007; Kousis, 2007). However, as our aim here is neither to provide a comprehensive overview of the environmental protest scene in Sweden nor to exhaustively analyze the resistance in question, but rather to illustrate its diversity as regards actor constellation, argumentation and strategies, these potential problems are manageable. Our focus lies on the manifest actions and argumentations of the resistance's different actor groups, and thus, while we are attentive to the fact that the media logic certainly does affect the representation of the conflict, there is, as Earl et al (2004) point out, no reason to believe that this manifest level of protest would be better accessed through other forms of empirical material (see also Herkenrath & Knoll, 2011). While we do acknowledge the risk of missing certain events and processes that occurred hidden from the media eye, we believe our main arguments would still stand if we used other kinds of material. Using interviews ten years after the fact would not be desirable, as we would then be researching the actors' personal and retrospective views, as participators with a clear stake in these events and their representation today. The participation of several actors can also only be studied through press material from the time of the events, as they left no other statements or documents behind. Furthermore, given that the conflict was largely waged through the press, our focus on press material seems apt.

Using the search word "Ojnareaskogen" [Ojnare Forest] in the Retriever search engine, we collected 1,892 newspaper articles, covering a wide array of news articles, op-eds, and debate and interview pieces, dating from January 2008 to September 2016. These articles were read in an analytical process in which we focused initially on the central meanings. From this process, we identified the following categories as key to an analysis of how the environmental resistance was constituted in relation to processes of governance: the local anchoring of the

resistance, its heterogenous composition, the cooperation between resistance actors, the relation between actor groups on different levels and with different historical backgrounds, the conflict between national interests, the controversy concerning the water supply, the use of scientific authority and scientific arguments, the role of the environmental courts and disagreements over the application of the Environmental Code, the role of state agencies, the campaign of the regional authorities, and patterns of conflict between the political parties on a national and a local level. We subsequently used these categories in a second round of close reading. We paid special attention to their occurrence over time and how events/factors associated with them changed. This second reading resulted in a narrower set of categories, according to which the paper is structured.

Of the 1,892 articles identified as relevant, we have referenced around 100. However, this list could easily have been expanded (or substituted with another, similar list), and the 100 references should be viewed as simply a representative selection. To verify the validity of our argumentation, we have based our analysis only on such statements and events that are reported by several independent sources, and we have further strengthened the validity by comparing statements from several newspapers on a local, regional and national level, as well as from several different actors. The width of the material – close to 2000 news articles, editorials and opinion pieces – means there is a strong empirical basis for the patterns that we highlight and analyze.

Background: Neoliberalization of Swedish mining and the Ojnare limestone quarry

Swedish mining should be seen in the context of a general depoliticization of the environment that has spanned decades. In the 1980s, years of political mobilization within and outside of parliament around the issue of nuclear power culminated in the national referendum by which it was decided that nuclear power would be successively phased out, only eight years after Sweden's first nuclear power plant was put into operation. Even though the question remained politically potent for years afterwards, it was gradually made an object of technocratic decision-making focused on the technical details around storage and phase-out, and thus depoliticized. The same development can be seen as regards environmental politics in Sweden overall. The political energy that infused several environmental issues from the 1960s through the 1980s have gradually evaporated, and the environment has come to be construed as an object of expert administration and calculation, rather than a catalyst of - and a projection area for - fundamental value conflicts (Anshelm, 1995, 2004; Hedrén, 1994; Lundqvist, 2004). Environmental controversies have not disappeared, but they have largely

become the preserve of Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (ENGOS) and/or highly localized resistances (e.g. Alm, 2006; Anshelm & Haikola, 2016; Hrelja, 2006). Thus, environmental politics have seen a division of labour of sorts, between technocratic management of the environment within the formal state apparatus, and politicization of the environment occurring as extra-state, localized actions. Since the 1990s, this process has been further strengthened by a neoliberal reorientation in Swedish politics generally. This reorientation has entailed a commitment to ecological modernization and “green growth” that in itself is premised on the depoliticizing notion of a widespread and fundamental consensus around the need to make environmental sustainability go hand in hand with economic growth (Lidskog & Elander, 2012; Hysing, 2014; Thörn & Svenberg, 2016).

Neoliberalization of the Swedish mining sector has been ongoing since the 1990s and been accompanied by depoliticization. A technocratic process for mining permits has been put in place that clearly favors the applicant. The premise of the legal procedure is that minerals extraction should be facilitated (Liedholm Johnson, 2000, 2010). Prospecting and mining concessions are handled by the Swedish Mining Inspectorate,² a subsidiary of the Geological Survey of Sweden, a state agency with a formal mission to further the interests of the extractive industries. Since the implementation of the Mineral Law in the early 1990s, approval of mining applications has generally been a formality, even though the legislation allows for competing interests to be prioritized over extractive interests. Typically, the only matter open to question has been the environmental prescriptions imposed on a project by the Environmental Court, not the project permission itself (interview Haikola: Å.P., Swedish Mining Inspectorate, 20/5/2015). In the years 2004–2012, the Mining Inspectorate granted 38 mining concessions, while none were declined (Geological Survey of Sweden, 2016).

As government policy has shifted toward less direct state involvement, the government has increasingly come to identify the role of the state as being that of facilitator, easing access for private and foreign capital to Swedish mineral deposits. Responsibility for supervision of the industry has been delegated to regional authorities and environmental courts. Official policy has been guided by the idea that mining is inherently beneficial for Sweden as a whole, and the potential for fundamental value conflicts related to the expansion of the extractive industrial sector has thereby been disavowed (Anshelm and Haikola, forthcoming; Envall, 2015; Haikola and Anshelm, 2016). In this way, the mining sector has been receiving indirect support from successive governments in the

² Limestone, which is the mineral in this case study, is not a so-called “concession mineral”. Thus applications to mine it do not need separate approval by the Mining Inspectorate. Instead, they are handled directly by either the County Administrative Board or the Environmental Court.

21st century. Mining companies have free access to geological survey data and face relatively low barriers in the form of landowner rights, environmental regulation, and requirements regarding the financial stability of market entrants, even though the legislation does allow for potentially drawn-out appeal processes (Growth Analysis, 2016). This possibility was used to its full extent by the groups critical of the Ojnare Forest limestone quarry.

In 2005, the Finnish company Nordkalk applied for a concession to locate a limestone quarry encompassing 170 hectares in the Bunge Ducker area, also called the Ojnare Forest, located in northern Gotland. The company bought a large piece of land where the deposit was located, based on an estimate saying that it contained enough limestone to produce 2.5 million metric tonnes annually for 25 years. As it happened, this piece of land was positioned between two Natura 2000 classified areas in the vicinity of Lake Bästeträsk, the only major water reservoir in northern Gotland. At the same time as Nordkalk submitted their application, officials at the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) had started to work on an investigation for the Swedish government concerning which areas to prioritize as new national parks in Sweden. The agency favored an area around Lake Bästeträsk including the Ojnare Forest, but only on the condition that no quarry be allowed there (Klefbom, 2012). Thus, two national interests – mineral resource supply and nature conservation – were positioned against each other.

The Ojnare conflict as politicization through scale shifts and diversification

Scaling up through actor alliances

The first group to protest the planned limestone quarry in the Ojnare Forest consisted of local farmers, forest owners, inhabitants, private entrepreneurs, artists, and students at Gotland University. They argued that the project threatened their living environment and way of life (see Svansbo, 2012; Olsson, 2012; Sveds, 2012b; Radhe, 2012b, 2012c; Ehn, 2012; Petersson, 2012; Abresparr, 2013b). In 2006 they formed the organization Bevara Ojnareskogen [Preserve the Ojnare Forest]. They published articles in the local and national press and prepared statements for reports and project assessments, as well as appeals to the environmental courts. The organization invited members of the public to join

them on excursions intended to spread knowledge of the physical environment they perceived to be under threat. The possible ecological consequences of a limestone quarry also alarmed the County Administrative Board (CAB) on Gotland as well as the local Environment and Health Committee. Both of these bodies appealed several of the Environmental High Court's rulings as the conflict unfolded (Schill, 2009).

Early on, the Preserve the Ojnare Forest organization made deliberate attempts to link its cause with resistance to other extractive industrial projects in Sweden (see Årsmöte med..., 2008; Hjernquist, 2009; Rüger and Rüger, 2011). A national network of collaboration between different groups was set up, resulting in joint ventures such as protest marches and extended site visits. Experiences were exchanged between, for example, representatives from reindeer herding districts from the Swedish north and the resistance group on Gotland. This scaling up was facilitated when established and well-respected ENGOs such as the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC), the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), and the conservative Swedish Botanical Association (SBA) joined forces with the local protesters. Apart from their widely recognized expertise and the fact they are politically unaffiliated, these organizations brought with them a large national support base and crucial economical and juridical resources. As the process developed, more activist ENGOs such as Greenpeace and Nature and Youth Sweden (NYS) would also join the protesters' ranks, garnering further support for the cause both nationally – with editorials, authors and performers expressing their support in the press – and locally as they organized militant protest actions following the legal ruling to allow the limestone quarry in 2012 (see Greenpeace vädjar..., 2008; Nilsson, 2012; Abresparr, 2012a; Svensson, 2012a; Ardelius, 2012; Gerson, 2012; Sveds, 2012a; Svansbo, 2012; Sandberg, 2012; Polis skyddar..., 2012; Greider, 2012; Abresparr, 2012b; Gustafsson, 2012b; Fjaervoll, 2012; Fler aktivister..., 2012; Skeri, 2012; Petersson, 2012; Nilsson, 2013; Abresparr, 2013a; Wallstedt, 2013; Israelson, 2014; Leino, 2014; Wirtén et al. 2015b; Wanneby, 2015).

A crucial further dimension was added to the resistance through the actions of SEPA, which throughout the process continuously argued for the protection of the Ojnare Forest by making it a national park. The agency appealed all legal permit approval decisions, bought land adjacent to the suggested quarry area, and lobbied the government to designate the Ojnare Forest a Natura 2000 area, a classification that would stop mineral exploitation once and for all (Gustafsson, 2012b; Klefbom, 2012; Leino, 2015; Lundberg, 2015; Mål om..., 2015). The Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management (SwAM) was equally vocal in its critique of the project and the court rulings in its favor (Gustafsson 2012b). Thus, the unique situation arose in which protesters resorting to extra-

parliamentary actions could refer to the argumentation of state agencies, who had traditionally been cast in the role of enemies by the more radical part of the Swedish environmental movement (Abresparr, 2012a; Gerson, 2012; Abresparr, 2012b; Fjaervoll, 2012; Skeri, 2012; Abresparr, 2013a; Wirtén et al., 2015b; Wanneby, 2015). Through this vertical connection between different levels of resistance the Ojnare protests manifested themselves as a significant force with socio-cultural and scientific legitimacy, impossible to dismiss as the mere NIMBY (Not In My Back-Yard) reactions of a small, conservative, local population (see further Cinalli, 2003; Rootes, 2013).

However, this was not simply a case of the grassroots gaining legitimacy by framing their resistance in terms of arguments sanctioned by state agencies, but rather a dynamic cross-fertilization within a heterogeneous constellation of actors (see also Delina et al, 2014; de Rosa and Caggiano, 2015; Neville and Weinthal, 2016). At the peak of the controversy during the summer of 2012, when Nordkalk's logging entrepreneur was physically stopped by protesters chaining themselves to machines, the SEPA and SwAM, having appealed the legal approval of the project, upped the frequency of their public statements of opposition. The county governor of Gotland made an official plea to Nordkalk to halt the deforestation and wait for a verdict from the Supreme Court about the appeal. As the confrontations continued, the County Administrative Board, in its capacity as supervisory authority, ordered the deforestation to cease pending further legal clarification (Svensson, 2012b; Klint Langland, 2012; Pettersson, 2012; Wadendal, 2012). There was thus an intersection of scales as local, regional and national, as well as civil, extra-parliamentary and state actors, allied themselves to reveal deep conflict lines within the democratic system.

The new alliance of environmental interests also forced a break within the traditional alliance between the Social Democratic Party and its power base in the unions and extractive industries. In 2014 the Social Democrats, who had supported the quarry plans both locally and nationally, joined a coalition government with the Green Party, who had been critical of the project. The new Minister for the Environment, Åsa Romson from the Green Party, came under intense pressure to live up to her former critique. In the summer of 2015, she delivered on her promises, proclaiming the Ojnare Forest a new Natura 2000 area (Wirtén et al., 2015a, 2015b; Holm, 2015; cf. Greider, 2015). The Social Democratic prime minister Stefan Löfven expressed regret for the implications of this proclamation for the local lime extraction industry, but explained that it was necessary from a purely scientific perspective. The Stockholm press suggested that he had given in to Green demands, with the Ojnare Forest being used as a bargaining chip in internal government negotiations (Brandel, 2015a, 2015b; Jewert, 2015; Stenberg, 2015; Öjemar, 2015). At the local level, the conflict gave

rise to unusual coalitions, with the local Green Party being supported by the Left and the Liberals as they began voicing critique of the project, while the liberal Centre Party, the Conservatives and the Social Democrats supported Nordkalk (Fridolin and De Maecker, 2010; Lindman-Mata, 2011; Radhe, 2012a; De Maecker, 2012).

Scaling up through discourse coalitions

The scaling up of the local conflict anchored in the Ojnare Forest also occurred at the level of discourse – as it was expressed in the public debate - through the linking of different but related framings of the world as it is and as it should be (Hajer, 1995; see also Snow and Benford, 1988, about “frame resonance”, and Anshelm and Hultman, 2015, for a similar application of the concept of discourse). The basic line of argumentation that would run through the drawn-out controversy over Ojnare was established at the outset, when protesters living or working in the vicinity of the proposed limestone quarry labelled it a potential environmental disaster, threatening both the fresh water supply and biodiversity in a unique environment (Svansbo, 2012; Olsson, 2012; Sveds, 2012b; Radhe, 2012b, 2012c; Ehn, 2012; Petersson, 2012; Abresparr, 2013b). However, as Conde (2017) shows is common in present-day conflicts over extractive industrial projects, this rather fixed and delimited concern would shed its local skin as it was construed to be one instance among many in relations of power and values, in themselves codified in national and supranational regulatory frameworks.

At its most immediate level, the issue of whether a limestone quarry was suitable at the proposed location was framed as an issue of environmental values against capitalistic values. ENGOs such as SSNC, WWF, and SBA, backed by government regulatory agencies such as the SEPA, the SwAM, and the Meteorological and Hydrologocial Institute, academic experts, and local government agencies, proclaimed the need to safeguard both a unique biotope and the area’s unique aesthetic values. They also referred to the placement of a limestone quarry in the immediate vicinity of two Natura 2000 areas as a breach of the EU Habitats Directive (Wadendal, 2012; Sveds, 2013a, 2013b; Leino, 2015; Kihlberg, 2015a). Against these arguments, Nordkalk put forward the large numbers of local jobs to be created, and the crucial importance of the project for Sweden as an exporter of raw materials (Kihlberg, 2015b). This was not, however, a simple issue of “environmentalism versus capitalism,” as revealed by the fact that a group of professors in national economics from different Swedish universities joined in the opposition. They argued through opinion pieces that the project was unsustainable on the basis of a rational economic calculus, and that the Ojnare Forest area would bring both more job opportunities and local as well as national income if preserved as an environmentally protected area (Lööf, 2012;

Heshmati et al., 2015; Kihlberg, 2015b; Feiz Aghaei et al., 2016). Their articles appeared at the same time as the confrontations in the forest and right before the Natura 2000 decision was due. They thus contributed to making the project appear increasingly as a special interest for Nordkalk, its employees and IF Metall, the union for Swedish industry workers.

By deliberately connecting the Ojnare Forest struggle to other localization conflicts around the country, the local protest groups strengthened the framing of the conflict as being about more than the immediately local, and as very different from a stubborn local population vainly trying to resist the winds of industrial change. By making common cause with Sami reindeer herders, the Gotland sheep farmers furthered the idea that their battle was of crucial importance to anyone concerned about surrendering their living environment to the national interest of mineral extraction (Carlsson Daun, 2012; Nilsson, J. 2012; Gahnfelt, 2012; Ericsson, 2013; Rehnberg, 2014; Björkqvist, 2014; Lundberg Tuorda et al., 2013; Hellgren, 2012; Persson et al., 2012).

Significantly, the local issue became anchored in a scientific-legal discourse as state agencies, well-respected ENGOs such as the SSNC and SBA, leading academics from geology and geohydrology, as well as the legal experts of the Environmental Court, all argued that the proposed limestone quarry was incompatible with the Environmental Code (Carlsson Daun, 2008; Jonasson, 2012; Forsström, 2012; Schill, 2014). The importance of gaining expert legitimacy for environmental resistance has been shown in several studies (e.g. Anshelm and Haikola, 2016; Bullard and Johnson, 2000; de Rosa and Caggiano, 2015; Rootes, 2005, 2009; Schlosberg, 2013). Given that consensus, depoliticization, and the status quo are fostered and upheld through the technocratic language of legal-scientific expertise, politicization and effective resistance can only occur through the construction of an oppositional expert discourse. The firm scientific backing for the protests against a limestone quarry meant that Nordkalk and the project's backers could not easily frame their stance as the rational one posed against a reactionary group of locals. By relating the issue to the EU Habitats Directive, protesters added a further dimension to the legal discourse, making the project seem even more controversial (Sveds, 2012c; Tar Ducker-brottet..., 2010; Sveds, 2010; Lindkvist, 2012; Wadendal, 2012; Sveds, 2013a, 2013b; Leino, 2015; Kihlberg, 2015a).

Perhaps most importantly, the scientific uncertainty identified by the experts who engaged in the conflict became grounds for elevating the conflict to a matter of legal principle. The Environmental High Court's approval of the project in 2010 can be seen as a milestone in the development of the conflict. The verdict seemed to raise the question that if the Environmental Code could not be applied

to hinder a project surrounded by such high level of uncertainty, then when could it be applied? From then on, the conflict came to be framed as a matter of crucial legal precedent, with major consequences both practically and symbolically (see Carlsson Daun, 2012; Nilsson J., 2012; Gahnfelt, 2012; Ericsson, 2013; Rehnberg, 2014; Björkqvist, 2014; Lundberg Tuorda et al., 2013; Hellgren, 2012; Persson et al., 2012).

Scaling up through the juridical process

To an extent previously unseen in Swedish environmental conflicts, the juridical process accompanying the Ojnare conflict was politicized with deep antagonisms both between experts and between juridical instances. On two occasions the Environmental Court dismissed Nordkalk's plans for a quarry, and on both occasions the Swedish Environmental High Court supported the company by overruling the lower court. This meant that the conflict came to pit one form of expertise against another, and to raise questions of how different experts' statements should be valued in relation to each other.

Inevitably, this dispute over scientific uncertainty evolved into a dispute over the application and interpretation of the Swedish Environmental Code. Intellectuals, artists, writers, and editorial writers joined in with public calls to defend the standing of the environmental legislation. Some added accusations that the Environmental Code had been sold out by a government and court system biased in favor of the extractive industries (Erfors, 2012, 2015; Franchell, 2012, 2013, 2015a, 2015b; Greider, 2013; Centerpartiet är..., 2015; Buskas, 2015; Ahlström, 2015). Both sides of the conflict engaged in this legal struggle, as Nordkalk immediately appealed verdicts against the project, and the resistance appealed decisions in favor of the project. Both state environmental agencies and the local administration, opposed to the project from the start, engaged in the battle of court appeals, and each verdict and appeal was accompanied by vocal critique from ENGOs and government agencies, who made full use of their institutionalized right to give advice on environmental matters (Sundberg and Simonsson, 2009; Carlson, 2010; Röhne, 2012; Klefbom, 2014; Wirtén et al. 2015b; Karlsson et al., 2012; Lihnell Järnheter, 2012; Karlsson and Vikström Olsson, 2012; Schill, 2009).

In parallel to the national legal process, resistance actors made sustained efforts to relate the project to the EU Habitats Directive, thereby opening up a further dimension of juridical controversy by highlighting how the national legal process came into apparent conflict with supranational authority (Sveds, 2010, 2012c, 2013a, 2013b; Tar Ducker-brottet..., 2010; Lindkvist, 2012; Wadendal, 2012; Leino, 2015; Kihlberg, 2015a). In the fall of 2010, having seemingly exhausted

the legal channels on a national level, the Protect Ojnare Forest organization proclaimed that they regarded Nordkalk's permit as incompatible with the EU Habitats Directive, and therefore wanted the EU commission to assess how the Swedish courts had dealt with the matter (Tar Ducker-brottet..., 2010). Soon thereafter, the SSNC said that they wanted EU courts to intervene in the Swedish legislative process, revoke the environmental permit given to Nordkalk, and start an investigation into whether Sweden had breached the EU treaties. Similar statements were issued by representatives of the SEPA and the Green Party, both in the Swedish parliament and in the EU Commission (Sveds, 2010; Sveds, 2012b; Lindkvist 2012; Wadendal, 2012). The Commission responded by voicing criticism of the Swedish government's handling of the case, accusing it both in public pronouncements and in letters of being biased in favor of the limestone industry (Leino, 2015). Ultimately, it was with reference to the EU legislation that the Social Democrat–Green government decided to give the Ojnare Forest legal protection.

The overtly political engagement of state agencies in the juridical process is a distinguishing mark of the resistance to the Ojnare limestone quarry. When the Environment High Court first gave permission for limestone extraction in 2009, thereby overruling the decision in the first juridical instance to refuse permission, the SEPA's biologist, Krister Mild, publicly declared that the agency held a view of how biological and ecological science should be interpreted in the case at hand that was diametrically opposed to the High Court's (Klefbom, 2012; Gahnfelt, 2011; Röhne, 2012; Gustafsson, 2012a). He accused the court of scientific ignorance and gullibility, claiming the juridical experts had uncritically bought the company line according to which future environmental effects could be ruled out. According to Mild, any such firm statements about the future were nonsense from a scientific point of view, and to put trust in them was to show a naivety highly unfitting for an environmental court (Gahnfelt, 2011). Such strong critique is unusual coming from a representative of a state agency. Similar, if somewhat less drastic, critique was voiced by the Directors General at both the SEPA and the SwAM (Gustafsson, 2012b). Experts from other scientific fields also questioned the line adopted by the company and accepted by the Environmental High Court, while leading professors in geology expressed concern that the risk of salt water intrusion in the Bästeträsk reservoir was downplayed in the environmental assessment made by the company (Carlsson Daun, 2008; Nilsson, 2008). A year later, in 2010, the Environmental High Court's approval of the limestone quarry was followed by vocal critique from the SEPA and the SwAM. Both agencies stated that they regarded the verdict as bordering on a legal scandal. Their protest was taken up by a number of professors from different fields who expressed great concern that the Environmental Code would be hollowed out if the project were allowed to go

ahead under such high scientific uncertainty (Röhne, 2012; Klefbom, 2012; Sveds, 2012c; Sandberg, 2012).

The controversy intensified in the summer of 2012 when, having been instructed by the Environmental High Court to define legal prerequisites for the quarry, the Environmental Court declared its inability to do so given the scientific uncertainty. When the Environmental High Court allowed the project to proceed in spite of this clear statement of dissent from the lower instance, it drew intense criticism from academic experts who claimed the scientific risk was too high to justify the court decision. Some also drew parallels to the environmental disaster at the Hallandsås over a decade earlier (Jonasson, 2012; Forsström, 2012; Schill, 2014; e.g. Boholm and Löfstedt, 1999). Again, the SEPA and the SwAM, the two state agencies, joined in the critique, with the Director General at the latter calling the Environmental High Court's permission of the quarry in 2012 "the decade's most unreasonable and faulty application of the Environmental Code" (Gustafsson, 2012b). For Krister Mild at the SEPA, the narrow interpretation of the applicability of the cautionary principle in the Environmental Code made by the Environmental High Court was so extreme that it risked being regarded as a legal precedent, making this the most important case involving the SEPA since the promulgation of the law in 1998 (Sveds, 2012c; Lennander, 2012).

Importantly, this overtly political approach by state agencies was used by activist organizations such as NYS to legitimize their extra-parliamentary, militant actions during the summer of 2012. It gave them, as well as the SSNC who publically declared its support for these actions, some credibility in their argumentation that the cobwebs had been swept from the black box of the legal process, revealing it to be arbitrary and tilted in favor of incumbent industrial interests (see Abresparr, 2012a, 2012b, 2013a; Gerson, 2012; Fjaervoll, 2012; Skeri, 2012; Wirtén et al., 2015b; Wanneby, 2015). Such arguments were further strengthened when four of the country's most renowned groundwater experts publicly claimed that the Environmental High Court's ruling was based on distortions of scientific expertise (Forsström, 2012; Schill, 2014). In this way, the diverse groups of actors working against the Ojnare limestone quarry succeeded in highlighting the political nature of court verdicts in cases where one national interest stands against another.

Concluding discussion

The politicization of the Ojnare limestone quarry was characterized by diversification that took the form of and resulted in three interrelated aspects: 1)

a further blurring of the classical political lines, making it impossible to analyze in terms of left and right politics, epitomized by the fact that a Social Democratic government ruled against one of its most traditional power bases by designating the Ojnare Forest a Natura 2000 area; 2) a heterogeneous gathering of highly diverse actors with different agendas, worldviews and ideologies, held together by an instrumental aim and by a patchwork of interrelated discourses that allowed the conflict to be framed differently depending on context; 3) an extension of the political process into the juridical process, with the employment of both national and supranational legal frameworks. Regarding the third aspect, we argue that the Ojnare resistance constitutes an intensification of the diversification process described by Conde (2017) and others (e.g. della Porta and Rucht, 2002; Rucht, 2002). In the following, we will discuss these three aspects of the Ojnare conflict in relation to each other. We will conclude with some remarks about what the further diversification of environmental resistance through the politicization of the juridical process could mean for future environmental politics.

A striking aspect of the Ojnare resistance is the diversity of its constituent parts and how loosely they held together. Rather than taking the form of a coherent organization with a definite political agenda – the inclusion of a neglected social group in the political system – and an identifiable leadership, it consisted of loosely connected, diverse groups of actors temporally united by an instrumental goal (see also Delina et al, 2014; de Rosa and Caggiano, 2015). It cannot be construed as a struggle of the oppressed against the powerful, or as the reaction of actors to a change in structural conditions that deprive them of material rights (see Melucci, 1989). Yes, it was partly constituted by protests by the relatively powerless against the relatively powerful. However, it was just as much about the actions of one elite against another, about agencies within the state establishment – in liaison with extra-parliamentary groups – operating against other state agencies. It could also be construed as being a conflict between a national, expert-environmentalist elite and local labor unions and workers who favored the limestone project due to the work opportunities it entailed.

The movement also resists being portrayed as a battle of coherent ideologies, for it harbored both critique of the capitalistic system from the outside, mainstream economic science, and the views of nature conservation organizations that are traditionally highly cautious about giving voice to any kind of system critique (see further Brulle, 2000, about the conservative character of the US preservationist movement). If anything, it is the triumph of a post-industrial capitalistic paradigm, focused on tourism and less resource-intensive forms of value production, over an industrial-capitalistic paradigm focused on the extraction of raw materials. The Ojnare resistance is thus not one of an

empirically verifiable, homogenous class of people, identifiable by themselves or others as such, against another, but of a plurality of values becoming organized in the focus on a single, temporally finite and geographically well-defined issue (cf. Plows, 2006; Rozema et al, 2015). As such, it can be said to constitute an instance of what Hardt and Negri call “the multitude,” the joining in action of “internally different, multiple social subjects whose constitution and action is based not on identity or unity ... but on what it has in common” (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 100).

The geographically delimited area, the concrete locality, is of course the crucial axis around which the conflict complex evolved. It exists in a tension with other scales, and movement of the conflict along these scales was facilitated by actors relating it to different discourses. On the one hand, the movement was firmly anchored in the local place, with protesters staging civic protest actions by climbing trees destined to be felled. The scientific arguments crucial to its success were premised upon the uniqueness of the specific environment of the Ojnare Forest. At the same time, by explicitly connecting the protests against limestone extraction in Ojnare to other socio-environmental struggles, actors extended the conflict beyond its given, geographical limits, framing it as an issue of something more than this immediate conflict, and also as an issue of indigenous rights, the right to local self-determination, the need for environmental protection against extractive industrial interests, and so on. Thus, as Rootes has argued (2013), connecting to issues and actors above the local level significantly better the odds for local protests gaining real influence over national policy. However, the general claims only gain weight and focus when connected to a concrete locality.³

The way in which the locality is transposed onto other scales is perhaps most evident in the case of the juridical process, where key battles around the Ojnare Forest were fought. What stands out in the Ojnare conflict, even in relation to other conflicts that bear many of the same characteristics of a new kind of environmental resistance, is the almost activist role taken by state agencies as they involved themselves in the process with counterclaims and outright accusations of misinterpretations on behalf of other state agencies regarding scientific verdicts related to the Environmental Code. Analytically we can discern three separate dimensions in this extension of the politicization process through the legal arena.

³ See for example Neville and Weinthal, 2016, and Tarrow, 2005, for the importance of the local anchoring of environmental conflicts, and Carmin, 1999, for a discussion of local groups as pacesetters for environmental movements on a national level. Compare also Rozema et al, 2015, where the deliberate technocratization of the protests against the high-speed rail project, and their disconnecting from the local context, proved to be a strategic mistake.

The first dimension is the basic fact of establishing environmental legislation, an act that opens up the arena of litigation to, in principle, anyone with a stake in a specific project. Taking a planned infrastructure project to court is a well-established strategy for environmental movements in many countries. Not only does it offer the chance to gain a legal victory, but it also draws attention to the movement's arguments while significantly delaying construction, sometimes to the severe economic detriment of the project owner (e.g. Kemp et al., 2010; Davis and Franks, 2011; Kogel, 2013, Franks et al., 2014). In the Ojnare case the juridical process was used to its full extent by the resistance who, when national litigation options were exhausted, began appealing to EU legislation and attempted to directly involve EU legal authorities in the Swedish juridical process.

Secondly, the environmental legislation can become, as was the case in the Ojnare conflict, an object of political struggle in itself, as the legislation's juridical effectiveness involves actors in the politicization process that would normally adopt a more disengaged stance. We would argue that the reason state agencies, not famed for siding with the more radical side of environmental protests, became so politically involved is that the Ojnare process came to be interpreted as a crucial struggle for the future of the Environmental Code. This interpretative framing may be explained in two ways. Either it was a largely rhetorical move by state agencies who saw a tactical opportunity to elevate the particular issue about which they were concerned into a matter of juridical controversy, or they did indeed regard the case primarily as a matter of legal principle rather than a struggle about the concrete, local environment in and around the Ojnare Forest. Likely, both explanations have some truth to them. Either way, it is clear that this elevation of the conflict into a struggle about environmental legislation harbored a political potency in the absence of which the conflict would probably have developed in a much less antagonistic way. The engagement of state agencies, together with academic experts who opposed and deconstructed legal opinions based on scientific interpretations, made it clear that science, when applied in the courtroom, was anything but neutral and fixed.⁴

This politicization of the legal process may be further strengthened by a third dimension, which is opened when juridical instances make diametrically opposed interpretations of a case at hand. In the Ojnare process, the Environmental Court twice ruled that the project was incompatible with the environmental legislation. On both occasions the Environmental High Court ruled against the

⁴ For further reading on the often hidden, political dimension in the technocratic, legal discourse permeating environmental court cases in the US, see Cannon, 2015.

lower instance, thus further revealing the fundamentally political nature of legal decisions.

In the following, final section, we will turn to what this politicization of the legal process may mean for environmental politics in general.

Reversing depoliticization: Juridification as an extension of the political space

In recent years, researchers from a vast array of academic disciplines have pointed out the inadequacy of current governance structures and theoretical models for understanding and dealing with global environmental problems (Burke et al., 2016; Biermann, 2014; Hulme, 2009; Jerneck, 2017; Klitgaard, 2013). At the same time, political theorists have argued that environmental politics have run into an impasse due to their diversity, the heterogeneity of values embraced by environmental organizations, the incorporation of environmental organizations into formal, technocratic and system-preserving procedures of management, and the lack of a clear political, emancipatory focus that can unite whole classes of people against systemic injustices (see Alberoni, 1984; Cannon, 2015; Pellow and Brulle, 2005; Rootes, 2008; Swyngedouw, 2014; Thörn and Svenberg, 2016). We would argue that the kind of environmental resistance to extractive industrial projects described in this paper suggests a possible, progressive approach for future environmental politics. The two crucial aspects of this politics are those that have been highlighted in the discussion, namely the building of effective, cross-scalar actor constellations through the up-scaling of a locally anchored conflict, and the politicization of the juridical process centering on the issue of how existing environmental law should be interpreted.

There is a real risk, as several proponents of post-political theory suggest, that environmental concerns become depoliticized as they merge with neoliberal discourse and modes of governance and end up being framed in vacuous terms like “sustainability” and “resilience” (cf. Krueger and Gibbs, 2007; MacKinnon and Driscoll Derickson, 2013). The neoliberal framing, adapted as it is to facilitating the continuous expansion of moneyed interests, should not be interpreted as a feature inherent to environmental politics. Neoliberal governance of the environment is imposed, and as such it may also be opposed and changed through a politicization of the environment. What the Ojnare case and other cases in the literature show is that the potential for politicization of environmental issues lies in their ability to cross geographical, institutional and traditional political boundaries and serve as a political rallying call for very heterogeneous groups of actors (Kenis and Lievens, 2014, McCarthy and Prudham, 2004). Successful environmental resistances may escape what Harvey

calls the “militant particularism” (1996) of the strictly local by elevating locally anchored grievances into general conflicts about issues affecting different groups from a range of social classes in different ways (Rootes et al., 2012, Rootes, 2013). The question, then, becomes how trans-scalar environmental repoliticization may occur without the political strength inherent in a local “sense of place” having to be sacrificed in the process (see Rootes, 2007; cf. Rozema et al, 2015).

We believe an answer, as mundane as it is important, lies in the legal process, and in the existence of environmental legislation. As depoliticization is about the deferral of responsibility from official government to other channels, juridification is often seen as a defining feature of depoliticization (Jessop, 2014). However, our case study shows that legislation may also serve to facilitate the kinds of heterogeneous alliances that Conde (2017) points to as constitutive of 21st century mining resistances. The legal process not only opens up the option of litigation to protesters against a specific project, but also invites actors concerned about the status of environmental law into a process of politicization. For the latter, the fate of environmental law effectively replaces the “sense of place” (Rootes, 2007) as a political issue worthy of sustained and engaged action, without, however, the concrete, local issue losing its particularity and political force. The productive tension between the locally particular and the general is thus crucial in this dynamic of politicization. Just as it is impossible to imagine the resistance to mining in the Ojnare Forest gaining the force it did without key state agencies getting involved in politicizing the permit process, so the actions of state agencies cannot be conceived of without a significant pressure from the locally anchored resistance.

Jessop (2014) and Hay (2014) describe how depoliticization means that decision-making is transferred from channels of official government to formal channels of expert and technocratic management. While these channels of technocratic governance are thus geared toward depoliticization, they may, as Jessop points out, also be repoliticized. What we see in the case of Ojnare is a clear instance of such a process, with civic society targeting the channels to which depoliticized governance has been transferred, i.e. the juridical process of environmental permitting, rather than the official government from which decision-making powers have been delegated. Only in a subsequent process, when the repoliticization of the juridical process has been ongoing for several years, does it reach also into the parliamentary debate and result in government intervention. At the same time, experts and state agencies that form an important part of depoliticized environmental governance are key actors in the repoliticization process, as they come to interpret – whether this is primarily a tactical move or

not – the very basis of environmental protection, i.e. the Environmental Code, as being at stake.

Thus, environmental legislation seems to have an important double function of both allowing for depoliticized environmental governance and opening up the space for politicizing the formalized procedures by which socio-environmental relations are determined. As long as protesters against a specific project are incapable of elevating their struggle into a more general issue of concern, the mill of the law will grind on and the environmental legislation may serve a depoliticizing function. However, in cases such as Ojnare, where a localized issue is elevated to an issue of environmental legislation as a legal principle, the legal process opens up a unique avenue for politicization where actor groups can join forces across institutional boundaries. The environmental legislation serve both to *abstract* the strictly local and particular to a general level, and at the same time to *concretize* the fundamental conflict that is at stake. In the latter respect, it forms an important counterforce to the neoliberal notion of abstract space that can be compartmentalized and technocratically managed without recourse to fundamental deliberations on value (Lefebvre, 1991).

In the absence of environmental legislation, a crucial avenue for environmental politicization remains closed, as groups attempting to assert their voice in depoliticized processes of environmental governance are restricted to extra-parliamentary activities where support from state agencies seems unlikely. Having strong, or potentially strong, environmental legislation in place is certainly no guarantee of politicization of the environment against the depoliticizing forces of neoliberal governance. However, it may well be a prerequisite. It therefore seems reasonable to agree with McCarthy and Prudham (2004) that attacks on environmental legislation have been a key feature of neoliberal policy reform. If depoliticization serves to close avenues of politicization by, for example, juridification of decision-making, environmental legislation at least opens the possibility for a reversal of this process by repoliticizing the juridical process itself.

What we see in the case of Ojnare and other similar environmental conflicts is thus the very opposite of the “evacuation of the political” that theorists on post-politics have identified as a defining feature of much environmental politics (see also Anshelm & Haikola, forthcoming; cf. Swyngedouw, 2007). Instead, it shows an *expansion of the political sphere*. A strictly localized conflict traversed scales through the activation of state agencies and juridical instances alongside experts, ENGOs and grassroots activists, as active participants in what was revealed to be an intensely political process, namely the conflict between the extension of extractive capitalistic values and other values.

Acknowledgements

This research has been conducted within a project funded by the Swedish Research Council

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