Gender and inheritance in Swedish family forestry

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Abstract

Half of the Swedish forest land can be considered as family forestry, owned by some 345 000 individuals on 190 000 different properties. Viewed as a group of owners, it has become more and more heterogeneous. However, there are still some common features based on traditional perceptions of the farm as a project that spans over generations by shared values and a strong desire to preserve family ownership in accordance to a paternal inheritance tradition. In a study of family farming in two Swedish grain-growing districts Flygare (1999) demonstrates that women rarely can inherit a farm if there is a brother/male relative. She characterizes the role of women being a transitive element between father and son. In this paper women’s inheritance positions in contemporary family forestry in Sweden is examined by using three different sources (i) a national register of all forest owners (ii) an inquiry study and (iii) narrative accounts from female forest owners. These accounts were collected by a call in two major magazines, accompanied by a list of questions. An asymmetric ownership pattern is exposed in the analysis of all three materials. Gender certainly has an impact on who, what, and how family owned forest land is transferred from one generation to another. Furthermore, the analysis of the narrative accounts shows that a minority of the women correspond to the concept transitive element, introduced by Flygare (1999). A typology with three additional concepts namely transitive agent, transformative element and transformative agent, was therefore suggested and discussed in relation to present and future management practices.

Keywords: asymmetry, female heir, inheritance positions, management practices