Supplementary Material

# Interview study design

The article uses data from a qualitative interview study conducted in the spring of 2020 on the policy formation and implementation of the Ecosystem Services (ES) approach in Sweden.

The study included 35 respondents representing the Swedish government offices (1), state agencies (8), county administrative boards (3), municipalities (8), farmer and forest owner organizations (2), environmental organizations (1), consultants (3), forest companies (2), food processing companies (2[[1]](#footnote-1)), hunter organizations (1), the Sámi community (1), and housing and construction companies (3).

The respondents were strategically selected for being actively involved in ES policymaking and implementation and experienced in using the ES concepts in practice (“frontrunners”). A first set of respondents was strategically sampled based on their participation in the ES network organized by the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency. Snowball sampling was employed to select additional interviewees. This research design was used to obtain information on, insights into and experiences of the introduction and implementation of ES in Sweden from the actors most experienced with the ES approach.

The interviews were semistructured, and the interview guide focused on (i) how the respondents had worked with ES and the benefits and challenges they had experienced in this work and (ii) their assessment of the impact of ES on Swedish politics and governance of biodiversity. The interviews were conducted online, with the exceptions of two conducted by phone and one face-to-face. On average, the interviews took 50 minutes and were conducted by one researcher and an assistant. To ensure consistency across interviewers, the first seven interviews were conducted together, and throughout the study, the interview results were compared and discussed. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The interview data were analyzed using a qualitative thematic approach (Bryman 2012, chapter 24; see also Kvale & Brinkmann 2014). A first step in the analysis consisted of a close reading of interview transcripts, identifying key aspects related to how respondents used and valued the ES concept. These empirical categories were then compared to find common as well as diverging opinions and experiences across respondents and actor categories. Finally, the empirical results were contrasted with previous research results to help identify core categories of general relevance to ES research. In the end, four main dimensions proved salient: communication tools, boundary objects, monetary valuation, and conceptual innovation. Quotations were selected for illustrating different arguments and viewpoints rather than for representativity.

This research design has strengths as well as weaknesses. First, a case study of Sweden enables a contextual understanding of policy developments and underlying institutional structures, which is often necessary to understand complex policy processes. However, drawing on individual cases makes it important to also caution against unreflective generalization of empirical findings across countries and contexts. Second, empirical material was generated from interviews with actors across policy fields, institutional levels, and actor categories. This offered a valuable multiple-perspective lens through which to understand the impact of the concept (cf. Sabatier 2007) but also limits the ability to go in-depth into developments within individual policy fields and levels. Third, the study targeted respondents identified as “frontrunners” to obtain views and insights from those most experienced with using the ES concepts in practice. Important to note in interpreting the results is, however, that they are not based on a representative sample of Swedish organizations. The paper offers insights into how the concept has been valued and used, not an assessment of the wider uptake of ES in Sweden.

References

Bryman, A. (2012) *Social Research Methods.* (4th ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kvale, S. & Brinkmann, S. (2014) *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing.* (3rd ed.). London: Sage

Sabatier, P.A. (2007) Fostering the development of policy theory. In Sabatier, P.A. (Ed.) *Theories of the policy process.* (2nd ed.). Boulder: Westview Press, 321–336.

1. Due to shortage of time, one respondent participated by providing answers by e-mail. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)