

Media Discourses of a Sustainable Swedish North

Journalism, Places and Practices in Transition

The climate crisis entails some of the greatest challenges of present times. In the wake of the crisis, there are ongoing processes of a so-called green re-industrialisation in the northern parts of Sweden. Up to SEK 1,1 billion is to be invested in the development of basic industries, such as mining and steel production, in order to reduce their substantial carbon emissions. The goal is for the industries to become fossil-free. Access to important natural resources and the availability of relatively cheap renewable electricity in the Swedish North are factors that have been pointed out as answers as to why these processes and investments are occurring now (Larsson 2022).

The reindustrialisation also entails broader societal challenges. One major issue is the need for a larger workforce in industries and the public sector in the northern communities, which in turn requires a larger population and thus migration both within Sweden and from abroad. A rapidly growing population also puts pressure on the northern communities, regional or local governance, including the social sector, and services like healthcare, schools, and housing. The environmental, financial, social, and cultural impact on indigenous Sami communities are equally critical issues. The re-industrialisation relates to historical and present debates about the Swedish North and colonial ideas of exploitation of land and resources (Sörlin 1988; Eriksson 2010). The current transition is, at least partly, motivated by a “green” national narrative. The so-called green re-industrialisation and the societal transitions are complex and permeate multiple dimensions of society, if not all.

News media play an important democratic role (Nygren 2019). Both national and regional/local media provide important societal information to citizens and decision-makers. During the last few decades, the prerequisites, structures, and produc-



Fig. 1. Examples of news media in northern Sweden. ©Ida Åberg

tion of news have changed massively, and the ongoing and growing importance of the Internet and social media has changed information flows and economic structures, creating both opportunities and challenges for traditional media and news production in the present media ecology (Schäfer & Painter 2021). In a Swedish context, these challenges have led to closings of local newsrooms during the 2000s (Wallentin 2020) and news lacking local anchorage (Nygren & Nord 2019). However, it also seems that there has been a break in this trend in the last couple of years (Wallentin 2021). There are recent examples of media outlets that have invested in opening local newsrooms, for example in the Swedish North (see Fig. 1). News media is still one of the most widely used sources for information about the climate and climate change, and are therefore important actors in providing knowledge about, and understanding of, a changing climate (Schäfer & Painter 2021). Research on media and the climate has mostly consisted of studies of national media, and knowledge about climate and environmental issues in regional or local news media is largely missing (Egan Sjölander 2021).

The aim of this project is to study media discourses of the Swedish North, and the places, people and actors that are pointed out as central in the ongoing so-called green industrial transition. Furthermore, part of the aim of the project is to explore and critically examine the media industry's role, both on the national and the regional/local level, in contributing to transformation processes when it comes to creating more sustainable and just communities. Consideration of the heterogeneity of the Swedish North is an important context in the project, and stereotypical representations will be problematized.

The overarching theoretical and methodological framework of the project is discourse analytical (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips 2002). News media content will be studied to investigate how stories of a rapidly changing North get told, and which voices get heard. Using discourse analysis, dominant discourses and themes, central actors and places in the news media material will be identified, as well as how they are connected and positioned in relation to each other. To broaden the perspectives identified in news media, media ecologies of broadcast and social media will also be explored with a view to finding out how a larger network of actors interact and relate to each other. Furthermore, interviews with journalists will be conducted, aimed at exploring the media industry's role in impacting transition processes for creating more sustainable and just communities. Important questions like if, and how, journalistic practices and prerequisites affect discourses on the so-called green transition will also be studied in this project.

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