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Governance and Politics of Peatlands Restoration

"Co-Producing Climate Solutions: Peatland Restoration, Governance & Power in Denmark"

by

Johanna Nicola Kommer

Student ID number: 6261927

Supervisor: Malayna Raftopoulos, Email:raftopoulos@society.aau.dk

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1. Introduction

Ecological restoration has emerged as a cornerstone of global climate governance, as degraded ecosystems have become major sources of carbon emissions (Osborne et al., 2021; Sapkota et al., 2018). This is particularly evident in peatlands, which store around 30% of all terrestrial carbon, even though they cover only about 3% of the Earth's land surface, making them vital ecological infrastructures for climate mitigation (Patel et al., 2025; Rotherham, 2020) Historically, human interventions such as drainage, peat extraction, and agricultural expansion have converted many of these ecosystems from long-term carbon sinks into major sources of greenhouse gases (Rotherham, 2020).

In response, rewetting and restoring peatlands have become key components of European and national climate strategies. This shift also reflects a broader reframing of landscapes from extractive sites of production to regenerative ecosystems that deliver multiple public goods and services (Domegan et al., 2024). However, most research continues to treat restoration as a technical or biophysical process, focusing primarily on hydrology, vegetation, and carbon fluxes (Chanteloup et al., 2026). These restricted framings risk obscuring the socio-political, institutional, and epistemic dimensions of restoration that determine whether projects succeed or fail (Osborne et al., 2021; Tedesco et al., 2023).

Denmark provides a particularly instructive setting for examining these dynamics. In June 2024, the Danish government concluded the Green Tripartite Agreement (Aftale om et Grønt Danmark), a negotiated framework between the state, agricultural organisations, environmental NGOs, labour unions, industry associations, and municipalities that commits Denmark to the largest transformation of its agricultural landscape in over a century, including the rewetting of 140,000 hectares of carbon-rich peatlands by 2030. The agreement translates the binding obligations of the EU Nature Restoration Law into a domestic policy framework and provides the institutional context within which local restoration projects, such as Lille Vildmose in northern Jutland, are designed and implemented. It thereby offers a concrete example of how restoration science, policy, and practice are co-produced across levels of governance, and of how national climate targets are aligned with local agricultural transitions through negotiated frameworks. The agreement and its institutional architecture are examined in greater detail in Chapter 5.

The present thesis situates peatland restoration within an integrated theoretical framework that combines restoration governance, political ecology, and co-production. Each of these perspectives captures a distinct dimension of restoration in practice. Restoration governance (Sapkota et al., 2018) directs analytical attention to the institutional, legal, financial, and scientific mechanisms through which restoration is coordinated across scales. Political ecology (Osborne et al., 2021; Robbins, 2019) focuses on the power asymmetries, historical legacies, and structural drivers that shape who participates in restoration and whose interests it serves. Co-production (Jasanoff, 2004) examines how scientific knowledge, policy frameworks, and social orders are mutually constituted, foregrounding the question of how categories such as "degradation," "success," or "the rational farmer" come to be authorised within governance documents. Taken individually, each framework captures only a partial view of restoration. It is the interaction between these perspectives; the way governance arrangements both reflect and reproduce power relations, and the way scientific categories and policy instruments are co-produced through political negotiation, that this thesis brings into focus. By applying this integrated framework to the Danish Green Tripartite Agreement and the Lille Vildmose restoration project (which is the case study of this analysis), the study conceptualises peatland restoration as a multi-level, co-produced governance process in which ecological, political, and social dimensions are deeply intertwined. It is a transformation that reconfigures relationships between knowledge, power, institutions, and communities (Domegan et al., 2024; Sapkota et al., 2018).

2. Restoration Governance as a Socio-Ecological Transformation

Restoration governance provides the central theoretical foundation for this thesis. It moves beyond classical ecological restoration, which traditionally focused on the technical repair of damaged ecosystems, and instead regards restoration as a complex socio-ecological transformation. Rooted in interdisciplinary environmental governance scholarship, it describes the exercise of legal, economic, social, scientific, and administrative authority to coordinate mechanisms that enable long-term ecosystem recovery (Sapkota et al., 2018). In this sense, governance serves not only as an institutional framework but as a process of negotiation, power mediation, and meaning-making through which restoration becomes a societal project rather than a purely ecological one (Tedesco et al., 2023).

2.1 Defining Modern Ecological Restoration

Modern understanding of ecological restoration has changed and evolved significantly from its early conceptualization through a natural science lens. As Martin (2017) argues, ecological restoration should be redefined to capture both what restoration does, which is assisting ecosystem recovery, and why we restore ecosystems, which is to reflect common values and beliefs. This dual perspective recognizes that restoration is simultaneously a scientific and social concept, embodying a "humanistic project" that aims to fulfill social values and renew relationships with nature rather than serving only as a productivity-based technology (Ceccon et al., 2020; Martin, 2017).

Earlier conceptions viewed restoration as an apolitical process of ecological engineering, often described as "gardening with wild species" or "repair technology" aimed at returning ecosystems to their historic baselines (Ceccon et al., 2020; Martin, 2017). However, modern understandings of restoration governance define success in more holistic terms: the reestablishment of ecological functionality alongside social legitimacy, cultural importance, and economic sustainability (Choi, 2004; Sapkota et al., 2018). This reframing is grounded in the recognition that environmental degradation is driven by political-economic relations and cannot be addressed in isolation from its social, institutional, and historical contexts (Osborne et al., 2021).

Governance constitutes the basis through which societies organize restorative action. According to Sapkota et al. (2018), restoration governance rests on four mutually reinforcing pillars:

Legal and institutional frameworks that define authority, rights, and enforcement mechanisms. These provide the guiding norms and legal authority to implement and oversee long-term restoration projects, ensuring accountability and continuity past short-term funding cycles.

Financial mechanisms that ensure stable, long-term support. This includes traditional funding sources as well as innovative approaches like payments for ecosystem services, carbon markets, and public-private partnerships that can sustain restoration efforts over decades.

Social arrangements that guarantee participation, legitimacy, and conflict resolution. These include stakeholder engagement processes, community participation mechanisms, and governance structures that ensure restoration projects are socially acceptable and democratically accountable.

Scientific and technological innovations that provide the tools for intervention and monitoring. This pillar includes not only restoration techniques but also monitoring systems, adaptive management approaches, and tools that enable evidence-based restoration practice.

2.2 Process-Oriented Approaches to Restoration

Restoration is not a linear process moving from expert planning to community compliance, but a fluid, iterative form of decision-making. Shifting from a narrow "project-based lens" to a "process-based" approach, it is often described as "muddling through", a method that blends planned goals with experimentation, uncertainty, and adaptation to both intended and unanticipated changes (Domegan et al., 2024). This perspective acknowledges that restoration outcomes are not predetermined but appear through ongoing negotiations between different actors, forms of knowledge, and changing environmental conditions.

The Irish LIFE IP Peatlands and People project exemplifies this approach, where former peat harvesters have become ecological restorers, transforming from "drain diggers" to "drain blockers" in a process that requires constant adaptation to local conditions, stakeholder needs, and emerging opportunities (Domegan et al., 2024). This transformation illustrates how restoration governance mediates between diverse actors and conflicting temporalities: short-term policy cycles, long-term ecological processes, and the lived experiences of local communities.

At its core, restoration governance embodies a transformative vision of human-environment relations (Sapkota et al., 2018). It aims not simply to reverse ecological decline but to create regenerative systems that enable equitable and sustainable futures (Osborne et al., 2021). This requires what Tedesco et al. (2023) call "polycentric governance", meaning involving interacting leadership between organizations and local communities to manage power asymmetries and ensure that restoration contributes to broader social-ecological transformation.

The degree to which restoration governance can align temporal and institutional scales determines the legitimacy, resilience, and success of any restoration process (Rangan & Kull, 2009; Sapkota et al., 2018). Effective governance must address what Osborne et al. (2021) identify as the "politics of scale," integrating local environmental specificities into national and international "chains of explanation" to address global drivers of degradation while respecting local contexts and needs.

Recent scholarship has increasingly applied integrated governance frameworks to peatland and wetland restoration, demonstrating both the analytical value and the practical limits of the approaches examined in this thesis. Terzano et al. (2022) develop a community-led "5Rs" framework for peatland restoration in Southeast Asia, thereby extending the conventional rewetting and revegetation approach with participatory monitoring and community revitalization, showing that restoration outcomes depend as much on local ownership and adaptive governance as on technical interventions. Januar et al. (2021) reach a similar conclusion in their study of peatland restoration governance in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia, where centralised planning without initial local involvement was perceived as externally imposed, reducing local legitimacy and motivation. These findings resonate with Pacoma et al. (2025), who demonstrate in tropical peatland contexts that polycentric and ecosystem-based governance arrangements are essential for navigating the institutional rigidities and jurisdictional overlaps that undermine restoration at scale.

The challenge of aligning governance scales is equally evident in non-peatland contexts. Wiegant et al. (2020) identify five distinct scale challenges in Ecuadorian forest and landscape restoration governance, including the tension between national hectare-based targets and locally prioritised hydrological functions, a dynamic closely related to the Danish case examined in this thesis. Boulot (2026) further demonstrates, in an analysis of three Australian regulatory frameworks, that effective restoration governance requires long-term institutional capacity that extends well beyond short-term project cycles and front-end approvals, pointing to the temporal mismatches between political planning horizons and ecological recovery timescales that Sapkota et al. (2018) identify as a central challenge. Taken together, these studies confirm that the integration of governance, knowledge, and community agency is not merely theoretical but an empirical condition for restoration success, and that its absence consistently produces the governance failures that this thesis traces in the Danish peatland context.

3. Political Ecology: Power Relations and Environmental Transformation

Political ecology complements restoration governance by offering a critical lens through which to understand the interdependence of ecological processes and political-economic power. It is a theoretical approach that combines ecological analysis with political economy to explore how nature and society are co-produced through historical, economic, and institutional relations (Osborne et al., 2021; Robbins, 2019). Political ecology rejects the notion that environmental

degradation is a purely biophysical phenomenon; instead, it frames socio-environments as power-laden spaces where ecological outcomes arise from struggles over resources, meanings, and governance (Nygren & Rikoon, 2008; Osborne et al., 2021).

3.1 Power Relations and Environmental Governance

Political ecologists focus on how power relations mediate material, symbolic, and discursive struggles over natural resources, controlling labor, resources, gains and losses, conflicts and contestations, and how these play out spatially (Elias et al., 2021). A central insight from feminist political ecology is that unequal power relations occur at different scales and among different types of actors: between the state and local communities, within communities, and among members of households (Elias et al., 2021). These power asymmetries fundamentally shape how restoration priorities are set, whose knowledge counts, and how rights to resources and benefits are distributed.

In the context of restoration, political ecology challenges "science-first" interventions that treat degraded landscapes only as biophysical problems to be solved (Elias et al., 2021; O'Riordan et al., 2016). Such approaches risk erasing the social and political processes that produce degradation and shape restoration outcomes. The Irish experience with peatland conservation provides a compelling example: conservation authorities initially adopted a "science-first" exclusionary approach that ignored postcolonial subjectivities regarding property rights and local knowledge, leading to significant resistance from turf-cutting communities (O'Riordan et al., 2016).

A central conceptual tool in political ecology has been the idea of "chains of explanation," which trace local environmental changes back to broader structural forces such as global trade, state policy, or colonial land regimes (Rotherham, 2020). More recent iterations have evolved into "webs of relation," emphasizing the fluidity and multiplicity of actor relationships, identities, and epistemic communities (Rocheleau, 2008). This shift underscores that restoration cannot be adequately explained through vertical hierarchies of causality alone and it must be understood as taking place within complex, overlapping networks of social, ecological, and political relations.

The concept of chains of explanation is particularly relevant for understanding peatland restoration, as it reveals how local restoration practices are embedded in global climate policies, national carbon targets, and international relationships. For instance, European peat extraction

for horticulture connects local bog ecosystems to global supply chains, creating complex dependencies that must be addressed in restoration planning (Patel et al., 2025).

3.2 The Politics of Scale

Equally crucial is the concept of the politics of scale. Scale, in political ecology, is not a neutral or pre-given spatial framework but a social construction that reflects power relations (Elias et al., 2021; Rangan & Kull, 2009). Decisions about whether restoration is organized at the level of a local bog, a regional watershed, or a national carbon program are inherently political because they define which actors have authority and whose knowledge is legitimized.

In peatland restoration, for instance, defining a "national rewetting target" centralizes control in state institutions, whereas local-scale initiatives distribute agency and foster different types of legitimacy and accountability (O'Riordan et al., 2016). The Danish Agricultural Transition Agreement exemplifies how different scales can be productively integrated through polycentric governance that allows for both national coordination and local adaptation.

3.3 Historical Awareness, Root Causes, and Environmental Justice

Political ecology draws attention to historical awareness, recognising that restoration inevitably unfolds on landscapes already shaped by centuries of socio-economic processes, land reforms, and in many contexts, colonial histories (Elias et al., 2021). These "remembered pasts" influence who is considered to have legitimate claims to land, how narratives of degradation and recovery are framed, and whose knowledge is treated as authoritative (O'Riordan et al., 2016). A political ecology approach therefore insists that restoration cannot be understood in isolation from the historical conditions that produced the degradation it seeks to address.

The work of Fairhead and Leach (1998) on West African forest history provides a foundational illustration of this principle: colonial narratives of deforestation were used to justify restrictive conservation policies that misrepresented local farmers who were in fact promoting forest regrowth through sustainable practices. This demonstrates how political ecology can "reframe orthodoxy" by destabilising dominant accounts and repositioning local actors as co-creators rather than destroyers of ecological knowledge. More recent studies have confirmed and extended this insight. Bliss and Fischer (2011), in their analysis of restoration governance in Eastern Europe, documented how the adoption of neoliberal land reform frameworks in postsocialist contexts systematically marginalised local ecological knowledge in favour of

Western conservation models, revealing how historical-political transitions shape what counts as legitimate restoration practice.

Political ecologists further argue that restoration projects frequently fail because they address only the symptoms of degradation rather than its underlying structural drivers (Osborne et al., 2021). These root causes are well-documented in empirical research across diverse contexts. (Benzeev et al., 2025) in a large-scale comparative study of restoration outcomes across Brazil's Atlantic Forest, found that land tenure regime was among the most significant determinants of long-term restoration success: private properties showed markedly lower restoration longevity than collectively or indigenously managed lands, demonstrating how structural inequities in land governance directly shape ecological outcomes.

In the European context, policy contradictions, where states simultaneously support extractive land uses through subsidies while promoting restoration through other mechanisms, represent a particularly salient structural driver of governance failure (Osborne et al., 2021; Patel et al., 2025). These contradictions cannot be resolved through technical or financial instruments alone; they require what political ecologists describe as a fundamental realignment of political-economic incentive structures and a critical reckoning with how historical state policies have produced the very degradation that restoration now seeks to address. As the Danish case examined in this thesis illustrates, the silence on historical drainage subsidies in current restoration policy is not incidental, it is constitutive of a problem representation that forecloses more transformative governance responses.

3.4 The Political Ecology Playbook for Restoration

To ensure that restoration is effective and equitable, Osborne et al. (2021) have developed principles for a "Political Ecology Playbook" that addresses these systemic issues:

Ensuring procedural and distributional equity to determine who bears the costs and who enjoys the benefits of restoration. This requires careful attention to how restoration projects affect different social groups and ensuring meaningful participation in decision-making processes.

Addressing power asymmetries through polycentric governance models that involve interacting leadership between state organizations and local communities. This can help prevent the marginalization of local communities and ensure that restoration serves community needs.

Aligning global targets with local aspirations, ensuring that international carbon or biodiversity goals do not override the self-determined needs of those living on the land. This requires flexible governance arrangements that can accommodate diverse local contexts within broader policy frameworks.

Promoting regenerative interventions that shift financial incentives away from destructive practices, such as fossil fuel extraction, toward sustainable, community-led stewardship. This involves restructuring economic systems to support rather than undermine restoration goals.

The empirical relevance of these principles has been confirmed across diverse restoration contexts: (Gorneau et al., 2023) demonstrate that equity-centred governance, where the perspectives of the most vulnerable and affected actors are placed at the centre of restoration decision-making, consistently increases both the ecological effectiveness and long-term sustainability of restoration outcomes, while (Chanteloup et al., 2026) show in the Scottish context how land redistribution and participatory governance can enable more transformative restoration processes than top-down policy frameworks alone.

4. Co-Production: Knowledge, Governance and Environmental Order

Co-production, derived from Science and Technology Studies (STS) and associated most notably with Sheila Jasanoff (2004), deepens the theoretical understanding of how knowledge and governance are mutually constitutive. In the context of restoration, it refers to the intertwined creation of scientific facts, policy frameworks, and social orders. Restoration does not simply apply scientific knowledge to a set of social problems but continuously reshapes both science and society through negotiation, contestation, and practice.

This perspective complicates the traditional linear model where science "produces" knowledge, policy "translates" it, and local actors "implement" it. Instead, co-production conceptualizes restoration as an ongoing dialogue in which these domains continually shape one another (Tedesco et al., 2023). Scientific research defines the technical parameters and monitoring frameworks that make restoration thinkable; policy-making transforms this knowledge into legal and financial instruments; and local actors reinterpret these norms through their everyday practices, cultural values, and lived relationships to the land.

The Irish peatland case illustrates this dynamic clearly. Scientific knowledge about carbon sequestration in peatlands shaped policy frameworks like the EU Habitats Directive, which in turn influenced local practices around turf cutting. However, local resistance to these policies, grounded in "place-based knowledge" and historical experience, forced a reconsideration of both the scientific understanding and the policy approach, leading to more adaptive governance arrangements (O'Riordan et al., 2016).

4.1 The Political Dimensions of Co-Production

Co-production is inherently political because it reveals how categories such as "degradation," "ecosystem services," or "nature-based solutions" are socially constructed through processes of valuation and negotiation. These constructions determine which forms of evidence gain authority and which remain marginal (Jasanoff, 2004). In the peatland context, for example, carbon metrics have become dominant indicators of success, thereby privileging measurable emissions reductions over less quantifiable cultural or aesthetic values associated with landscapes (Patel et al., 2025; O'Riordan et al., 2016).

The concept of environmentality, meaning how individuals and communities internalize environmental values and responsibilities, is particularly relevant here (O'Riordan et al., 2016). When local actors are included in decision-making and their knowledge is recognized, restoration can foster a sense of ownership and moral responsibility. However, when they are excluded or marginalized, restoration initiatives may face resistance, as seen in the Irish turf-cutting controversy where top-down approaches undermined trust and legitimacy.

5. From Theoretical Framework to Empirical Analysis: Restoration Governance as Policy Practice

The preceding chapters developed an integrated analytical framework that draws on restoration governance, political ecology, and co-production to conceptualise ecological restoration as a socio-ecological transformation. This chapter functions as a bridge between this theoretical framework and the empirical analysis that follows. Its purpose is to: translate the theoretical concepts developed thus far into a heuristic that can guide the empirical examination of restoration governance in practice; to identify the specific research gaps that this thesis addresses; and to introduce the policy frameworks and the site that together constitute the empirical material of this study.

The three theoretical perspectives developed in Chapters 2 - 4 each direct analytical attention to a different dimension of restoration practice: restoration governance to institutional coordination, political ecology to power and historical structures, and co-production to the mutual constitution of knowledge and policy. Together, they suggest that an empirical analysis of restoration governance should not be limited to assessing whether policies achieve their stated targets. It should also examine how policies construct the problems they propose to solve, whose knowledge they authorise, what they render invisible, and what subject positions they produce for the actors they address. This analytical orientation underpins the choice of Bacchi's "What's the Problem Represented to Be?" approach as the methodological framework for the analysis, the basis for which is developed in Chapter 6.

5.1 The European Restoration Architecture and Multi-Level Translation

In recent years, the European Union has emerged as a dominant force in shaping the governance of ecological restoration across member states. The EU Nature Restoration Law (Regulation 2024/1991) establishes legally binding obligations for member states to restore at least 30% of drained agricultural peatlands by 2030, increasing to 40% by 2040 and 50% by 2050. This represents what Brancalion and Van Melis (2017) describe as a "policy-push" approach: ecological science is translated into mandatory political commitments that drive member-state action while allowing for nationally differentiated implementation.

The translation of European obligations into national policy frameworks illustrates what restoration governance scholarship describes as polycentric governance (Sapkota et al., 2018; Tedesco et al., 2023): a mode of coordination in which authority is distributed across interacting centres of decision-making rather than concentrated in a single hierarchical institution. National governments must operationalise EU goals within their own socio-economic and institutional contexts, and the resulting national instruments differ significantly across member states. The Danish case examined in this thesis represents one such national translation, characterised by a strongly negotiated mode of agricultural policy-making.

5.2 The Danish Case: Negotiated Transition and the Tripartite Agreement

As outlined in the Introduction, the Danish Green Tripartite Agreement (Aftale om et Grønt Danmark) of 24 June 2024 constitutes the national empirical centre of this thesis. Its institutional architecture is unusual in both scale and composition. With an allocation of

approximately 40 billion DKK through the Danish Green Land Fund (Danmarks Grønne Arealfond), the agreement supports voluntary land-use transitions, including the rewetting of 140,000 hectares of carbon-rich peatlands by 2030. It was subsequently translated into a binding political accord on 18 November 2024 (Aftale om Implementering af et Grønt Danmark), which established 23 local tripartite structures organised around the country's water catchments. Together, these two documents constitute the national-level policy framework analysed in Chapter 7.

The Tripartite Agreement is significant for this thesis for two reasons. First, it exemplifies the polycentric and negotiated mode of governance that the restoration governance literature identifies as characteristic of effective multi-level coordination (Sapkota et al., 2018; Tedesco et al., 2023). By bringing together state institutions, agricultural organisations, environmental NGOs, labour unions, industry associations, and municipal authorities within a single framework, it operationalises the kind of cross-sectoral coordination that governance scholarship typically treats as a precondition for ambitious restoration. Second, and more critically, the agreement raises questions that political ecology and co-production frameworks bring sharply into view: the central role assigned to voluntary participation and economic compensation, the construction of the farmer as a "modern land manager" (moderne arealforvalter), and the absence of any reference to the historical role of the Danish state in producing the very degradation that restoration now seeks to address. These tensions form the analytical entry point for the policy analysis in Chapter 7.

The question of how such transitions are made socially acceptable is closely connected to the literature on “Just Transition” (Domegan et al., 2024). In Ireland, the LIFE IP Peatlands and People project reframed former peat harvesters as ecological restorers, transforming "drain diggers" into "drain blockers" through retraining, community engagement, and the active repositioning of affected workers as participants in restoration governance. The contrast with the Danish framing of agricultural transition as primarily an economic-incentive problem is examined in detail in Chapter 7.

5.3 Lille Vildmose: A Multi-Level Restoration Site

The local empirical focus of this study is Lille Vildmose, located in northern Jutland and one of the largest restored raised bogs in Northern Europe. The site has been the object of substantial

restoration investment under successive LIFE+ projects implemented by the Danish Nature Agency (Naturstyrelsen), the Aage V. Jensen Naturfond, and the City of Aalborg, and it carries multiple international designations including Natura 2000 and Ramsar status. Lille Vildmose is institutionally legible: its outcomes are documented in publicly available reports; notably the LIFE+ Layman's Report, the project Slutrapport, and the Natura 2000 Action Plan, which together provide a coherent corpus for analysing how national restoration policies are translated into local practice. The site therefore offers an empirically rich setting in which the European, national, and local dimensions of restoration governance can be examined together within a single case.

Taken together, the EU Nature Restoration Law, the Danish Green Tripartite Agreement, and the local documentation for Lille Vildmose constitute the three-level governance architecture within which Danish peatland restoration is currently being enacted. The remainder of this thesis examines this architecture not by assessing the technical effectiveness of its instruments, but by interrogating how each level constructs the problem of peatland restoration and the solutions it makes thinkable.
Chapter 6 develops the methodological framework for this analysis, and Chapter 7 applies it systematically across the three governance levels.

5.4 Research Gap

Despite the growing body of literature on restoration, three gaps in the existing scholarship motivate the approach taken in this thesis.

First, much existing research continues to prioritise ecological and technical dimensions, focusing on carbon dynamics, hydrology, and biodiversity outcomes while treating restoration as a largely technical challenge (Rotherham, 2020; Tedesco et al., 2023). This approach overlooks the broader socio-political, institutional, and epistemic processes that shape restoration in practice. Governance-oriented studies have begun to address this limitation by highlighting the importance of policy frameworks, institutional arrangements, and stakeholder coordination in enabling restoration (Sapkota et al., 2018). However, these studies often focus on the design and effectiveness of governance systems without fully examining how these systems are shaped by and interact with scientific knowledge and local practices (Patel et al., 2025).

Second, while political ecology provides a critical perspective on power relations, land-use conflicts, and historical processes, it has been relatively underexplored in the context of European peatland restoration. Much existing political ecology literature focuses on tropical forest contexts or other environmental issues, leaving peatland restoration as an emerging but still underdeveloped field within political ecology research (Osborne et al., 2021). The Danish case, situated at the intersection of ambitious national climate targets, a politically powerful agricultural sector, and a long history of state-led drainage policy, offers a particularly instructive setting in which to extend political-ecological analysis to a European peatland context.

Third, while co-production has been widely applied within Science and Technology Studies, its application to restoration governance remains limited (Brancalion & Van Melis, 2017). There is particularly a lack of empirical studies that examine how scientific knowledge, policy frameworks, and local actors interact in specific restoration contexts (Chanteloup et al., 2026). This is a significant gap, given that restoration is very dependent on the integration of these different perspectives.

This thesis addresses these gaps by combining political ecology, co-production, and restoration governance into an integrated analytical framework, and by applying this framework to a specific empirical setting: the Danish Green Tripartite Agreement and the Lille Vildmose restoration project.

6. Methodology

This chapter develops the methodological framework that guides the analysis in Chapter 7. It outlines the analytical approach (6.1) and the case study design (6.2) through which the integrated theoretical framework developed in Chapters 2–5 is brought to bear on the empirical material.

6.1 Analytical Approach

The research uses a document analysis guided by Carol Bacchi's "What's the Problem Represented to Be?" (WPR) approach. Rather than asking what policy does, this framework asks how policy constructs problems; what "counts" as degradation, what forms of knowledge

are legitimized, and what governance responses become possible as a result. The WPR perspective fits closely with political ecology and co-production by examining how knowledge and power co-produce policy narratives and determine whose interests and worldviews are embedded in restoration programs. Through this lens, the study interrogates the political rationalities underlying Danish peatland governance and the ways in which state, scientific, and local actors negotiate the meaning of restoration and sustainability.

Bacchi's WPR framework comprises seven questions, of which this analysis applies five: Q1 (what is the problem represented to be?), Q2 (what presuppositions underpin this representation?), Q4 (what is left unproblematic, and where are the silences?), Q5 (what subjectification effects does this representation produce?), and Q7 (how can the problem representation itself be reflexively interrogated?). Questions Q3 and Q6 are not addressed systematically. Q3 traces the genealogy of a given problem representation, how the problem came to be constituted historically through the interplay of discourses, institutions, and practices, and would require archival material on the long-term development of Danish agricultural and conservation policy that lies beyond the document analysed here. Q6 examines how problem representations are produced, disseminated, and defended in practice, which would require interview or ethnographic data capturing how policy actors and local stakeholders actively reproduce or contest these framings. Both questions are valuable analytical lenses but exceed the scope of a document-based study. The five questions retained allow for a thorough examination of how restoration governance is constructed across scales while remaining within the empirical reach of the available material.

6.2 Case Study Design

This study adopts an embedded single-case study design (Yin, 2014). Denmark constitutes the bounded case, with the analysis operating across three embedded units that correspond to the three levels of restoration governance introduced in Chapter 5: the European policy framework (EU Nature Restoration Law, 2024), the Danish national level (Green Tripartite Agreement, 2024, and its implementing accord of November 2024), and the local implementation context (LIFE+ Layman's Report, the project Slutrapport, and the Natura 2000 Action Plan for Lille Vildmose). This embedded design allows the analysis to trace how problem representations and governance logics transform as restoration moves from supranational regulation to local practice, rather than treating each governance level as a separate or independent case.

The orientation of the study is exploratory and interpretive rather than explanatory. Following Yin (2014), Lille Vildmose is studied not for its intrinsic properties but as a site through which the integrated theoretical framework developed in Chapters 2–4 can be examined in practice. The case is therefore instrumental: it provides an empirical basis for theoretical claims about co-production, power relations, and the multi-level architecture of restoration governance.

Three considerations motivated the selection of this case. First, the ambition of Denmark's rewetting targets under the Green Tripartite Agreement creates a high-intensity policy environment in which the tensions between climate goals, agricultural livelihoods, and historical land-use patterns are particularly visible. Second, the multi-level institutional extent of the Lille Vildmose project; combining EU designations (Natura 2000, Ramsar), national funding instruments (LIFE+), and local implementation structures, makes it possible to study within a single case how the three governance levels interact in practice. Third, the project's institutional access, with publicly available documentation of its development and outcomes, makes a document-based analysis viable without the access constraints that would attend interview- or ethnography-based research designs.

7. Analysis

7.1 Introduction: Approach to the Analysis

This chapter applies the analytical framework developed in Chapter 6 to the three policy documents that together constitute the multi-level governance architecture of Danish peatland restoration: the EU Nature Restoration Law (2024) at the European level, the Danish Green Tripartite Agreement (2024) and its implementing political accord (November 2024) at the national level, and the LIFE+ Layman's Report and the project Slutrapport, at the local level of Lille Vildmose.

The analysis is organised document by document. Sections 7.2, 7.3, and 7.4 each apply the five WPR questions retained for this study (Q1, Q2, Q4, Q5, Q7) systematically to one of the three governance levels. This document-by-document organisation has two advantages. First, it allows each policy framework to be examined in its own institutional and political context before being compared across scales. Second, it maintains the analytical consistency of the WPR approach, in which each question is applied to a specific text rather than abstracted across multiple sources.

Section 7.5 then synthesises the findings across the three governance levels. It identifies three cross-cutting problem representations that emerge from the document-level analysis and operate coherently across the European, national, and local scales: the construction of peatlands as a measurable climate problem, the construction of the farmer as a rational economic actor, and the construction of restoration as a governance success story. Tracing these representations across scales reveals how the multi-level architecture of restoration governance is held together not only by formal institutional coordination, but by shared presuppositions, shared silences, and shared subject positions that travel from one level to the next.

A summary matrix of the WPR analysis across all three governance levels is provided in Table 1 (in the Appendix), which serves as a synoptic reference for the document-level analyses that follow.

7.2 The EU Nature Restoration Law (2024)

7.2.1 Q1: What is the problem represented to be?

At the European level, the Nature Restoration Law (Regulation (EU) 2024/1991, hereafter NRL) constructs ecosystem degradation as a systematic governance failure that requires legally binding correction. The opening recital states this premise: "It is necessary to lay down rules at Union level on the restoration of ecosystems to ensure the recovery of biodiverse and resilient nature across the Union territory. Restoring ecosystems also contributes to the Union's climate change mitigation and climate change adaptation objectives" (Recital 1). The two problems in this framing are: a biodiversity crisis and a climate crisis, conceptualised as deeply interlinked and both requiring ecological restoration as the central instrument of response.

Three features of this problem representation are analytically significant.
First, the problem is represented as measurable and target-able. The NRL operates throughout in the grammar of quantifiable obligations: "at least 20% of land areas and at least 20% of sea areas by 2030, and all ecosystems in need of restoration by 2050" (Article 1(2)). For peatlands specifically, Article 11(4) sets binding sub-targets: "30% of such areas by 2030, of which at least a quarter shall be rewetted; 40% of such areas by 2040, of which at least a third shall be rewetted; 50% of such areas by 2050, of which at least a third shall be rewetted." Restoration is therefore constituted as a problem to which a measure-based solution can be applied, a

framing that aligns closely with what the literature on environmental governance describes as the "audit culture" of contemporary climate policy (Patel et al., 2025).
Second, the problem is represented as one of collective action at the European scale. The NRL frames national-level inactivity as the central governance gap: previous regulatory instruments, including the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and the Birds Directive (2009/147/EC), are diagnosed as insufficient because they "do not set a deadline" for achieving favourable conservation status (Recital 27). The 2020 State of Nature Report, cited at length in Recital 12, is used to legitimise this diagnosis: it found that "the Union has not yet managed to stem the decline of protected habitat types and species" despite three decades of existing legislation. The NRL therefore represents the problem as one that requires binding, time-bound obligations imposed at Union level, which is a shift from the directive-based, member-state-led governance of the previous regime to a regulation that is "directly applicable in all Member States."

Third, and perhaps most consequentially, the problem of ecosystem degradation is represented as primarily ecological and climatic in nature, with social and historical dimensions appearing only as contextual modifiers. Recital 12 identifies the drivers of biodiversity decline as "the abandonment of extensive agriculture, intensifying management practices, the modification of hydrological regimes, urbanisation and pollution as well as unsustainable forestry activities and species exploitation." The framing is very technical: it names what is being done to ecosystems, but not who has been doing it, who has benefited from doing it, or under what historical conditions these practices became common. For peatlands, this is particularly noticeable: Recital 59 describes "drained peatlands in agricultural use" as a category of land requiring restoration, but does not engage with the question of how those peatlands came to be drained in the first place, which is a question that, as Section 7.3 demonstrates, is similarly absent from the Danish national policy framework.

In sum, the NRL represents the problem of ecosystem degradation as a quantifiable, supranationally coordinated, and primarily biophysical governance challenge. This approach makes a specific set of solutions possible: binding targets, national recovery plans, monitoring frameworks, financial incentives, whilst ruling out others, including issues of historical accountability, distributive justice and the political and economic structures that caused environmental degradation in the first place. The presuppositions that sustain this representation, and the silences it produces, are examined in the following sections.

7.2.2 Q2: What presuppositions underpin this representation?

The NRL's representation of ecosystem degradation as a quantifiable and supranationally coordinated governance challenge is sustained by several presuppositions that are rarely made explicit in the text itself, but which are of fundamental importance to how it works. Four presuppositions are particularly significant.

First, the regulation presupposes that nature is quantifiable, measurable, and target-able. This is most visible in the System of Environmental Economic Accounting referenced in Recital 15: "SEEA EA constitutes an integrated and comprehensive statistical framework for organising data about habitats and landscapes, measuring the extent, condition and services of ecosystems, tracking changes in ecosystem assets, and linking that information to economic and other human activity." The framing of ecosystems as "assets" that can be tracked statistically is not a neutral methodological choice. It is the operationalisation of a particular ontology of nature, where ecological value is rendered understandable through hectares, indicator species, carbon stocks, and habitat condition assessments. From a co-production perspective (Jasanoff, 2004), this presupposition illustrates how scientific frameworks (SEEA EA, IPCC inventory methodologies) and policy frameworks (the NRL itself) establish each other: the regulation requires a particular form of measurable nature to function, and that form of nature is in turn legitimised by the regulation's adoption of it as the basis for binding targets.

Second, the regulation presupposes that scientific evidence is the legitimate foundation for restoration policy. This presupposition appears throughout the document: "It is important that Member States prepare detailed national restoration plans based on the best available scientific evidence" (Recital 65); "investing in monitoring and surveillance are necessary in order to underpin robust and science-based national restoration plans" (Recital 73). The Commission and the European Environment Agency are positioned as the privileged producers and validators of this evidence (Recitals 25, 72). What is absent is any recognition of place-based, local, or traditional ecological knowledge as a legitimate input into restoration governance. Indigenous knowledge is mentioned briefly in Recital 4, but only in the context of global biodiversity targets and their reference to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; it does not appear in the operational provisions of the regulation. This presupposition is what political ecology scholarship has consistently identified as a "science-first" framing (Elias et al., 2021; O'Riordan et al., 2016), in which expert-scientific authority displaces other forms of legitimate knowledge.

Third, the regulation presupposes that voluntary participation, supported by financial incentives, is the appropriate governance mode for engaging private landowners and farmers. Recital 54 articulates this assumption directly: "Financially attractive funding schemes for owners, farmers and other land-managers to voluntarily engage in such practices are important in delivering the long-term benefits of restoration." Article 11(6) makes the operational consequence explicit for peatlands: "The obligation for Member States to meet the rewetting targets […] does not imply an obligation for farmers and private landowners to rewet their land, for whom rewetting on agricultural land remains voluntary, without prejudice to obligations stemming from national law." This presupposition has significant analytical implications. It means that even where binding obligations are enforced on Member States, the rights of individual landowners to maintain extractive land uses are effectively shielded from regulatory compulsion. The costs of the transition are spread across society through public subsidy schemes, whilst decision-making power over specific plots of land remains with private owners. This same presupposition, meaning that voluntariness is the only legitimate mode of agricultural transition, also structures the Danish Green Tripartite Agreement at the national level, as Section 7.3 demonstrates.

Fourth, the regulation presupposes that Member States are the relevant governance actors. The grammar of the document is consistent throughout: "Member States shall put in place restoration measures," "Member States shall ensure," "Member States shall achieve." Sub-national actors, local communities, and individual landowners appear in the regulation primarily as objects of national policy or as stakeholders to be consulted (Recital 83). This premise reflects the structure of the EU itself; a union of Member States that enacts legislation governing its members, but has implications for how the governance of restoration measures operates at sub-national level. By designating Member States as the primary bearers of restoration obligations, the Regulation precludes the possibility of local or regional actors being treated as independent actors in the governance process. They appear, at most, as "implementers" or "participants" within nationally coordinated plans.

Taken together, these four presuppositions: measurability of nature, scientific authority, voluntariness, and the superiority of Member States, constitute the conceptual structure within which the NRL operates. These are not arguments put forward by the regulation; they are the conditions that enable it to put forward these arguments in the first place. Making them visible is the analytical contribution of the WPR approach: it reveals that the seemingly technical

choices embedded in the regulation are in fact political choices about whose knowledge counts, who is treated as a governance actor, and what relationship between state, market, and citizen the regulation assumes as legitimate.

7.2.3 Q4: What is left unproblematic? What are the silences?

What a policy document does not say is as analytically significant as what it does say. The WPR approach does not view silence as an accidental oversight, but rather as a defining feature of how the problem is framed: it reveals which issues the document cannot or will not address and which alternative perspectives are excluded by its underlying logic. In the case of the Nature Restoration Law, four silences are particularly noticeable, each of which is rendered visible by the theoretical framework developed in Chapters 2–4.

First, the NRL is silent on the historical role of European institutions and Member States in producing the ecosystem degradation, which is what they now seek to reverse. Recital 12 identifies the drivers of biodiversity decline as "the abandonment of extensive agriculture, intensifying management practices, the modification of hydrological regimes, urbanisation and pollution as well as unsustainable forestry activities and species exploitation." This framing presents these driving forces as if they were the spontaneous outcomes of unspecified historical forces. Any recognition that the intensification of agriculture in Europe that was actively shaped by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) itself is absent; the same policy framework that the NRL now identifies as a key vehicle for restoration funding (Recitals 58, 84). For peatlands in particular, this silence is structurally significant. Article 11(4) sets binding rewetting targets for "organic soils in agricultural use constituting drained peatlands," but neither this article nor the relevant recitals acknowledge that these soils were drained under decades of state-supported agricultural modernisation programmes, many of which received EU funding. The regulation therefore presents restoration as a forward-looking investment rather than a response to historically caused damage, thereby depoliticising a structural failure of governance to which the EU itself has contributed. As Osborne et al. (2021) argue, restoration projects that address only the symptoms of degradation without acknowledging its root causes risk reproducing the very political-economic relations that created environmental harm in the first place.

Second, the NRL is silent on the political conflict that surrounded its implementation. The regulation presents itself as a technical coordination instrument: a framework for Member States to collectively meet biodiversity and climate targets. What the document does not

acknowledge is that its passage was deeply contested. In March 2024, eight Member States, including Sweden, Italy, the Netherlands, and Hungary, withdrew their support, while Austria, Belgium, Finland, and Poland announced their abstention, causing the Council vote to be removed from the agenda. The regulation was eventually adopted in June 2024 only after intense political negotiation, and its implementation remains politically fragile in several Member States. None of this is to be found in the document itself, which is written throughout in the impersonal phrase “Member States shall…”, as if the obligations imposed in that were derived from technical reflections rather than negotiated politically. This silence is fundamental: any document that acknowledged its own controversial origins would have to address the question of whose interests stood in the way of the restoration and why, which in turn would undermine the portrayal of the restoration as a natural and necessary response to an objectively diagnosed crisis.

Third, the NRL is silent on place-based and local ecological knowledge. Across 93 pages, the regulation references "the best available scientific evidence" (Recital 65), the European Environment Agency (Recital 72), the Commission's framework for determining habitat condition (Recital 25), and an extensive monitoring and reporting infrastructure based on EU space data and Copernicus services (Recital 73). What is entirely absent is any recognition that the communities living on, working with, and historically shaping the landscapes targeted for restoration hold legitimate ecological knowledge of their own. Indigenous knowledge appears once, in Recital 4, in the context of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, and even there, only as an external reference rather than as a substantive input into European restoration governance. Recital 83 requires Member States to "engage local and regional authorities, landowners and land users and their associations, civil society organisations, business community, research and education communities, farmers, fishers, foresters, investors and other relevant stakeholders and the general public" in the preparation of national restoration plans. But this list; putting together municipalities, businesses, NGOs, investors, and the general public as undifferentiated "stakeholders", reveals more: it positions all of these actors as recipients of knowledge rather than as co-producers of restoration knowledge. This is precisely the "science-first" framing that political ecology and co-production scholarship have identified as a repeated governance pathology in European environmental policy (Elias et al., 2021; O'Riordan et al., 2016).

Fourth, the NRL is silent on the cultural and non-economic dimensions of landscapes. Restoration success is consistently defined through ecological indicators: habitat condition assessments, species populations, carbon stocks, hectares rewetted, and through their contribution to the EU's climate accounting framework. Recital 14 makes a fleeting reference to "economic, social, cultural, regional and local characteristics" as contextual factors to be taken into account, but this single phrase appears in a recital primarily concerned with the economic benefits of restoration. Nowhere in the operational provisions of the regulation does cultural heritage, landscape identity, or the lived meaning of place appear as a governance concern. For peatlands, this is particularly important: European bog landscapes carry centuries of social and cultural significance; as sites of fuel extraction, as sources of archaeological remains, as symbols of national or regional identity in many countries across the globe. None of this is clear to the NRL, which can only recognise peatlands as carbon stocks and territories of European Community interest. This silence reflects what Patel et al. (2025) describe as the dominance of carbon metrics in European peatland governance: a framing in which measurable emissions reductions take priority over less quantifiable cultural or aesthetic values.

These four silences are not independent of each other. They form a coherent pattern. By excluding engagement with historical responsibility, political conflict, local knowledge, and cultural value, the NRL constructs ecosystem restoration as a problem that can be solved through binding targets, financial instruments, and scientific monitoring, without requiring any reconfiguration of the political-economic structures that produced degradation, of the knowledge hierarchies that determine what counts as evidence, or of the relationship between European institutions and the communities on whose land restoration will happen. The silence, as we have seen, are not gaps in the document; they are part of what makes the document's active logic possible.

7.2.4 Q5: What subjectification effects does this representation produce?

Policy documents do not only describe the world; they also establish the actors within it. The WPR approach refers to this as subjectification: the process by which a problem representation produces particular subject positions, assigning roles, capacities, and responsibilities to different actors. These subject positions have real governance consequences, because they determine who is treated as a legitimate decision-maker, whose participation is required, and whose role is reduced to that of recipient or object of policy. Four subject positions are particularly significant in the NRL.

First, Member States are constituted as the primary subjects of restoration obligations. The grammar of the regulation establishes this position throughout: "Member States shall put in place restoration measures" (Article 4(1)), "Member States shall ensure" (Article 4(17)), "Member States shall achieve" (Article 8(3)). The binding nature of the regulation stems directly from this shift to a subjectification approach: legal obligations are imposed on national governments, which in turn must transpose these into domestic policy frameworks, such as the Danish Green Tripartite Agreement analysed in section 7.3. This subject position is consistent with the constitutional architecture of the EU itself, but it means that the focus of reconstruction policy lies at national level, thereby ruling out the possibility of supranational or subnational actors being treated as independent key decision-makers

Second, the European Commission and the European Environment Agency are constituted as the legitimate producers and validators of restoration knowledge. Recital 25 establishes the Commission's authority to develop "a framework and guidance for the determination of good condition of habitat types," while Recital 72 positions the EEA as the body that "should support Member States in preparing their national restoration plans, as well as in monitoring progress towards meeting the restoration targets." This subject position is not only technical: by locating epistemic authority at the European level, the regulation effectively centralises the definition of what counts as ecological evidence and what counts as restoration success. National scientific communities and non-institutional forms of ecological knowledge are positioned as sources of input into this framework and not as independent epistemic actors.

Third, farmers and private landowners are constituted as economic actors whose participation must be incentivised rather than required. This subject position is most clearly articulated in Article 11(6): "The obligation for Member States to meet the rewetting targets […] does not imply an obligation for farmers and private landowners to rewet their land, for whom rewetting on agricultural land remains voluntary." Recital 54 reinforces this: "Financially attractive funding schemes for owners, farmers and other land-managers to voluntarily engage in such practices are important in delivering the long-term benefits of restoration." Two implications follow here. First, farmers are positioned as recipients of policy whose behaviour have to be changed through financial mechanisms, they are not participants in the design of restoration governance, and not as owners of ecological knowledge whose expertise might inform restoration outcomes. Second, the right of landowners to maintain extractive land uses is treated as a legitimate baseline against which restoration must compete through attractive incentives,

rather than it being treated as a questioned political-economic arrangement open to renegotiation. The contrast with the Irish LIFE IP Peatlands and People project discussed in Chapter 5 is informative: that project actively reconstituted former peat harvesters as ecological restorers and governance participants, demonstrating that the subject position of "farmer as economic actor" is a political choice.

Fourth, local communities and civil society are constituted as stakeholders to be consulted. Recital 83 instructs Member States to "engage local and regional authorities, landowners and land users and their associations, civil society organisations, business community, research and education communities, farmers, fishers, foresters, investors and other relevant stakeholders and the general public, in all phases of the preparation, review and implementation of the national restoration plans." Grouping these diverse actors into a single, undifferentiated category ("Stakeholders") obscures the differences between the communities whose livelihoods depend on the restored landscapes, NGOs that have the institutional resources to participate in consultation processes, investors who have a financial stake in the success of the restoration, and the general public. All are positioned as participants in consultation rather than as co-producers of governance decisions. This subjectification effect is what Tedesco et al. (2023) identify as a recurrent limitation of multi-level environmental governance: whilst the involvement of stakeholders is guaranteed in procedural terms, in substance it is subject to the technical and scientific parameters established at higher levels of decision-making.

Taken together, these four subject positions establish a clear governance hierarchy. The Commission and EEA produce the evidence; Member States accept the binding obligations; farmers and landowners are incentivised to participate voluntarily; and local communities are consulted procedurally. The regulation does not explicitly set out this hierarchy, it is embedded in the structure of the document rather than being formulated as a normative requirement, but its effects are very real. As Section 7.3 demonstrates, the same hierarchical pattern is reproduced at the national level in the Danish Tripartite Agreement, where the state, agricultural organisations, and environmental NGOs negotiate restoration on behalf of communities whose role is reduced to economic compensation and consultation.

7.2.5 Q7: How can the problem representation itself be reflexively interrogated?

The final WPR question asks the analyst to reflect critically on their own analysis, recognising that the decision to read a policy document in this particular way is itself a choice with consequences. Three points are worth making here.

First, this analysis deliberately emphasises the political, epistemic, and historical dimensions of the Nature Restoration Law, and this emphasis comes at a cost. The NRL is the most legally binding nature restoration instrument ever adopted at European level, and its quantified targets for peatland rewetting, freshwater connectivity, and habitat condition represent a genuine break with the weaker, voluntary logic of earlier EU environmental directives. By focusing on what the regulation leaves unsaid and what it takes for granted, this analysis necessarily pays less attention to what the regulation actually achieves. This is a deliberate trade-off of the WPR approach, and it is better acknowledged openly than left implicit.

Second, the analysis relies only on the English-language version of the regulation. EU law is drafted and negotiated in many languages at once, and the precise meaning of key terms can shift between versions. A fuller historical analysis would trace how concepts such as "good condition" or "drained peatlands" came to be defined in EU law in the first place; a question that belongs to Bacchi's Q3, which this study does not address in detail. Working from the English text alone is a reasonable choice for a study focused on how the regulation operates, but it does limit how far the analysis can go.

Third, the interest of this thesis lies in the Danish case, and the NRL is examined here mainly as the European framework that shapes Danish peatland governance. This focus affects which parts of the regulation stand out and which silences become visible. Looking at how the same regulation is being implemented in several Member States, for example, comparing Denmark, Ireland, and the Netherlands, would most likely reveal silences and assumptions that a single-country perspective cannot see. The findings here should therefore be understood as shaped by this particular vantage point rather than as the only possible reading of the regulation.

7.3 The Danish Green Tripartite Agreement (2024)

7.3.1 Q1: What is the problem represented to be?

At the national level, the Danish Green Tripartite Agreement (Aftale om et Grønt Danmark, 2024) translates the European restoration imperative into a national policy framework. Where the NRL constructs the problem as a supranational governance gap, the Tripartite Agreement constructs it more specifically as an economic and environmental misalignment within the agricultural sector. Drained organic soils under cultivation are identified as a central target for reducing greenhouse gas and nitrogen emissions, and the agreement frames the necessary response as a essential restructuring of how Danish land is used. The document describes itself explicitly as a turning point: "Der er med aftalen tale om et paradigmeskifte i kvælstofindsatsen" ("This agreement marks a paradigm shift in nitrogen management", Aftale om et Grønt Danmark, 2024, p. 2).

The solution follows directly from this diagnosis. Rather than regulatory obligation, the agreement commits approximately 40 billion DKK through the Danish Green Land Fund (Danmarks Grønne Arealfond) to make land-use transition financially attractive. Its central measures include support for the rewetting of 140,000 hectares of carbon-rich peatlands including buffer zones by 2030 ("udtagning af 140.000 hektar kulstofrige lavbundsjorde inkl. randarealer frem mod 2030," p. 3), the afforestation of 250,000 hectares by 2045, and a CO2-equivalent tax on emissions from carbon-rich peatlands of 40 DKK per ton from 2028. The problem is therefore represented as one that can be resolved mainly through financial restructuring: if rewetting is made economically attractive, landowners will participate, and national climate and water-quality targets will be met.

Two features of this problem representation are analytically significant. First, the problem is framed as economic-technical rather than political or historical: it includes incentives, compensation, and cost-effectiveness, not the distribution of responsibility for degradation or the renegotiation of land-use rights. Second, the problem representation is built around the principle of voluntary participation. The agreement is clear that its regulatory architecture is designed to "[øge] den økonomiske tilskyndelse til at søge ind i frivillige ordninger" ("increase the economic incentive to enter voluntary schemes," p. 5). As Section 7.5 argues, this

voluntariness logic does not originate at the national level; it reproduces the framing already included in Article 11(6) of the EU Nature Restoration Law.

7.3.2 Q2: What presuppositions underpin this representation?

Three interconnected presuppositions hold this representation of agricultural transition as an incentive problem together.

First, the farmer is presupposed to be a rational economic actor whose land-use decisions are driven primarily by financial considerations. This assumption is not stated outright but is built into the agreement's design: the entire policy is built around making rewetting financially worthwhile, with repeated emphasis on strengthening "incitamentet for lodsejere" ("the incentive for landowners," p. 8). What this leaves out is everything about land-use that is not economic: identity, attachment to place, generational knowledge, and the social meaning of agricultural practice. As research on the rewetting of Danish organic soils has noted, what is at stake is not only economic calculation but deep relationships between farming communities and their landscapes (University of Copenhagen, 2022). These dimensions do not appear in the policy framework.

Second, voluntariness is presupposed to be the only legitimate governance mode. The agreement treats property rights as close to untouchabel: participation is structured as voluntary, and even where the document contemplates expropriation as a last resort for peatland set-aside, it does so under a revealing condition: that expropriation must not undermine the voluntary system. The agreement states that a model for expropriation will be explored "hvor eksproprierede lodsejere ikke stilles økonomisk bedre end de, der indgår i frivillige udtagningsordninger" ("where expropriated landowners are not placed in a better financial position than those who participate in voluntary buy-out schemes," p. 8). In other words, even the state's most coercive tool is subordinated to the logic of voluntary participation, so as not to disturb the incentive structure, which is a very revealing presupposition. This reflects a broader Danish and Nordic political culture in which agricultural policy has historically been developed through negotiated consensus (Daugbjerg & Halpin, 2010). But the presupposition is not politically neutral. As critics have noted, the commitment to voluntariness weakens guarantees, lets individual landowners set the pace of transition, and limits the state's ability to meet its own climate targets (Greenpeace Denmark, 2024).

Third, the state is presupposed to be a neutral facilitator rather than a historical actor. The agreement presents the Danish state as a mediator that aligns climate goals with agricultural livelihoods through funding and negotiation. What it never states, is that the state itself was a primary driver of the degradation it now wants to reverse. State-led programmes accelerated the draining of wetlands from the late nineteenth century onwards, with large-scale drainage actively encouraged through subsidies as part of agricultural modernisation (University of Copenhagen, 2025). The organic soils now targeted for rewetting are, to a significant degree, the product of decades of state-supported drainage. This history is entirely absent from the document, which frames transition as a forward-looking investment rather than as a response to harm the state helped create.

7.3.3 Q4: What is left unproblematic? What are the silences?

Three silences are particularly significant in the Tripartite Agreement's problem representation.

First, the agreement is silent on the state's historical role in producing degradation. Danish peatland drainage accelerated dramatically under state-led modernisation programmes; between 1975 and 2010 alone, drainage and peat extraction reduced the national extent of peatland areas by an estimated 35% (Gomes et al., 2023). The same institutions that now design compensation schemes spent much of the twentieth century subsidising the drainage of the very soils they now want rewetted. The agreement does not acknowledge this contradiction. By presenting transition as a forward-looking economic adjustment, it depoliticises what is, in structural terms, a historically produced governance failure. Acknowledging the state's role as a historical driver of degradation would require a different governance logic; one that is oriented towards redress and structural change rather than voluntary incentives (Osborne et al., 2021).

Second, the agreement is silent on the social identities and ecological knowledge of farming communities. Farmers are addressed as an economic category: landowners that own organic soils whose participation is required to meet national targets. What is missing is any engagement with the place-based knowledge and community dynamics of the populations most affected by transition. The landscapes targeted for rewetting carry cultural and historical meanings, shaped by generations of farming practice (University of Copenhagen, 2025), and the ecological knowledge embedded in those practices, of hydrology, soil conditions, and seasonal changes, is invisible in the document. Farmers appear as recipients of incentives, not as knowledge-holders whose expertise might shape how restoration is done.

Third, the agreement is silent on conflict. It presents agricultural transition as a consensual, negotiated process that balances climate objectives with agricultural livelihoods; which is fitting, given that it is itself the product of a tripartite negotiation. What it does not acknowledge is that the transition is contested, both within farming communities and between political actors. Environmental organisations have argued that the agreement relies on voluntariness in ways that weaken the regulatory framework (Greenpeace Denmark, 2024). At the same time, monitoring data reveal that Denmark currently lacks large-scale systems for tracking the greenhouse gas, nutrient, or ecological effects of rewetting projects; it only measures hectares in different phases of implementation (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2025). This gap between policy ambition and monitoring capacity is itself a governance problem that the document does not represent as one.

7.3.4 Q5: What subjectification effects does this representation produce?

The representation of transition as an incentive problem produces specific subject positions with real governance consequences.

The farmer is produced as a "modern land manager" (moderne arealforvalter), a subject position that the agreement names directly and repeatedly. The document states as a central ambition that "fremtidens landbruger bliver en moderne arealforvalter" ("the farmer of the future becomes a modern land manager," p. 3), and elaborates that "landmanden skal spille en nøglerolle i at forvalte fremtidens beskyttede naturarealer" ("the farmer must play a key role in managing the protected natural areas of the future," p. 12). On the surface, this appears to raise the farmer's status. But the position is still essentially that of someone who carries out policy: the farmer is recast as a manager of nature areas that the state defines, incentivised through the Green Land Fund, rather than as a co-producer whose own knowledge shapes how restoration is designed. The contrast with the Irish LIFE IP Peatlands and People project, discussed in Chapter 5, is very telling: that project turned former peat harvesters into ecological restorers and active participants in governance, changing their position rather than simply redirecting their economic behaviour (Domegan et al., 2024).

The state, meanwhile, is produced as a neutral negotiator standing between competing interests: climate objectives on one side, agricultural livelihoods on the other. This subject position conceals the state's historical role as a driver of degradation and obscures the power imbalances in the negotiation. The agricultural sector, represented by Landbrug & Fødevarer, and

environmental NGOs, represented by Danmarks Naturfredningsforening, were central participants in the tripartite negotiations alongside government agencies, labour unions (Fødevareforbundet NNF, Dansk Metal), industry (Dansk Industri), and municipalities (Kommunernes Landsforening). But the communities most directly affected by transition, rural farming households in areas such as northern Jutland, were not represented as distinct governance actors. They appear only as the population whose voluntary participation the incentive structure is meant to secure.

This pattern of subjectification mirrors the hierarchy identified at the European level in Section 7.2.4: institutional actors negotiate and decide, while affected communities are positioned as recipients of incentives and objects of governance.

7.3.5 Q7: How can the problem representation itself be reflexively interrogated?

Three reflexive points are relevant to the analysis of the Tripartite Agreement.

First, this analysis is based on a Danish-language policy document. While the substance of the agreement, meaning its targets, funding mechanisms, and governance principles, is clearly established, the finer nuances of the original Danish text are inevitably shaped by the process of translation. Where the text is directly quoted, the original Danish is given, alongside my English translation, so the reader can judge the interpretation also for themselves.

Second, like the analysis of the NRL, this reading deliberately foregrounds the political and historical dimensions of the agreement and gives less attention to its genuine climate ambition. The Danish Tripartite Agreement is one of the largest investments in landscape change in modern Danish history, and more sympathetic and focused reading would emphasize this more strongly. The choice to focus on silences and presuppositions is a feature of the WPR approach, not a neutral description of the document.

Third, the agreement was concluded only in 2024, and its implementation is still unfolding. This analysis therefore examines a problem representation at the moment of its articulation, before its effects on the ground can be seen. How the agreement's voluntary mechanisms play out in practice, and whether the silences identified here become points of future conflict, remains an open empirical question that this document-based analysis cannot answer.

7.4 The Lille Vildmose Project Documentation

7.4.1 Q1: What is the problem represented to be?

At the local level, the LIFE+ Layman's Report and the related project documentation reproduce the same technical framing of peatland degradation, now in a specific place. The problem is represented as ecological degradation caused by historical drainage and peat extraction. The Layman's Report frames the raised bog as a threatened habitat: "Raised bogs are today a rare and endangered natural habitat type due to farming, draining, overgrowing and eutrophication" (Layman's Report, 2019). It adds that at Lille Vildmose specifically, "thousands of hectares of raised bog have been excavated." Restoration is presented as a hydrological and biological fix: water levels must be raised, encroaching trees cleared, and sphagnum vegetation re-established.

Notably, governance failure is not named as a problem at all. Degradation appears as a largely technical-hydrological condition to be corrected through engineering measures: dams, dikes, ditch closures, tree clearance, predator control. The problem, at this level, is defined as the wrong water levels, the wrong vegetation, and declining species, not as the outcome of historical political-economic decisions about land use.

It is worth noting that the causes the report lists: "farming, draining, overgrowing and eutrophication", mirror the depoliticised language of Recital 12 of the EU Nature Restoration Law. In both cases, drainage appears as an abstract process rather than as a historically subsidised state policy. Together with the EU and national levels, this local framing completes a coherent chain: European targets define the scope of the problem, national policy turns it into an incentive structure, and local documentation operationalises it as a set of technical interventions. Across all three levels, restoration is constructed as a measurable, solvable problem and one that calls for regulatory pressure, financial instruments, and ecological engineering, but not for any rethinking of social relations or governance structures.

7.4.2 Q2: What presuppositions underpin this representation?

The local documentation rests on three presuppositions.

First, restoration success is presupposed to be measured through ecological indicators. The FINAL Report tracks progress through mapped habitat areas in hectares, water-level measurements, species counts, and the presence and coverage of sphagnum mosses; the

indicators explicitly used include "Water level" and "Presence and coverage of plant species including sphagnum" (FINAL Report, 2020). This presupposition produces a particular version of what a successful restoration is; one that is defined by biophysical outcomes, while leaving other forms of value, such as cultural significance or community benefit, outside the picture.

Second, the three institutional partners are presupposed to be the legitimate governance actors. The Layman's Report states that "The City of Aalborg, the Aage V. Jensen Naturfond and the Danish Nature Agency are the formal partners in the project," while other actors, including Lille Vildmoseforeningen (Friends of Lille Vildmose), are listed as "other partners" (Layman's Report, 2019). The idea that these three institutions form the legitimate partnership and that everyone else plays a supporting role, is never examined; it is simply taken for granted.

Third, and connecting these, science is presupposed to legitimise the project's success. Monitoring data, expert panels, and university and NGO research are mobilised throughout to demonstrate ecological improvement, while local communities appear as visitors, volunteers, and audiences rather than as decision-makers. This is a clear example of the co-production dynamic that Jasanoff (2004) describes: science and governance mutually validate one another. Scientific monitoring establishes the criteria of success, and the institutional partnership is legitimised by its ability to deliver against those criteria: a self-reinforcing loop in which the measurable and the governable define one another.

7.4.3 Q4: What is left unproblematic? What are the silences?

The silences at the local level are the most analytically significant of the three governance levels, this is where the gap between the governance narrative and the realities of landscape is clearest.

First, and most importantly, local conflict and resistance are largely absent from the public-facing documentation, even though the project's own technical reporting records their traces. The Layman's Report presents the project as consensual: "The project has focused on involving and briefing landowners, visitors, scientists and other specialists, and the project would not have been feasible without the cooperation of these people" (Layman's Report, 2019). Yet the FINAL Report tells a more complicated story. In evaluating the planned purchase of a strip of land along the edge of Tofte Mose, it records that the purchase achieved "None" of its goal, and that "Difficulties in getting an agreement with the landowners led to implementation … of an alternative solution where the dike along the edge of the raised bog is placed inside the bog"

(FINAL Report, 2020, p. 66). The phrase "an alternative solution" quietly resolves what was clearly a failed negotiation with landowners, without naming the conflict or the interests behind it. This is a clear example of how a success narrative manages conflict by making it technically invisible, and it is significant that the conflict surfaces only in the internal technical report, not in the public-facing Layman's Report.

Second, the history of peat cutting as a livelihood and cultural practice is acknowledged only as a cause of degradation, never as a source of legitimate knowledge or rights. The documentation notes the historical presence of drainage and peat extraction as the origin of the bog's deterioration, but this history is framed exclusively as a problem to be reversed. The lived experience of the communities who worked and shaped this landscape over generations does not appear as a governance concern, reproducing what Elias et al. (2021) identify as the erasure of place-based knowledge and its replacement by expert-scientific authority.

Third, the documentation is silent on the question of land-use rights and their distribution. The "alternative solution" passage is the only point at which landowners appear as actors with interests that diverge from the project, and even there, the divergence is resolved administratively rather than acknowledged as a real conflict over land. Non-ecological values, like cultural heritage, landscape identity, the social meaning of place, do not appear at all. This is the strongest WPR finding at the local level: the documentation constructs Lille Vildmose as a purely ecological object, leaving no room for the recognition that it is also a contested social and cultural landscape.

7.4.4 Q5: What subjectification effects does this representation produce?

The local documentation produces three distinct subject positions and performs one significant shift in scale.

The institutional partners: the Danish Nature Agency (Naturstyrelsen), the Aage V. Jensen Naturfond, and the City of Aalborg, are produced as the legitimate governance actors, holding authority and expertise, explicitly designated as "the formal partners in the project" (Layman's Report, 2019). Scientists and monitors are produced as the providers of legitimising evidence, their data establishing the criteria against which success is measured. The local community, by contrast, is produced as visitors, volunteers, and audience. Lille Vildmoseforeningen (Friends of Lille Vildmose) appears only as an "other partner," and the documentation foregrounds the

community primarily through visitor numbers and guided tours rather than through any role in decision-making. The community is therefore positioned as the beneficiary and observer of restoration, not as a participant in its governance.

A further subjectification effect operates through scale. As the FINAL Report notes, the Ramsar Convention "specifically promotes the importance of peatlands to mitigate climate change," and Lille Vildmose is positioned within this international framework. This Ramsar framing performs a scale transformation: the local bog becomes a site of internationally recognised climate and biodiversity significance. This repositions local actors as custodians of an internationally recognised asset rather than as stewards of a local landscape; a clear instance of the "politics of scale" that political ecology identifies (Rangan & Kull, 2009; Osborne et al., 2021). By lifting the site to the international level, the designation moves legitimate authority away from the local and towards the institutional and supranational, reinforcing the positions described above.

This local pattern completes the hierarchy running through all three governance levels: at each scale, institutional and scientific actors hold authority while affected communities are positioned as recipients, beneficiaries, or audiences.

7.4.5 Q7: How can the problem representation itself be reflexively interrogated?

The reflexive points are the sharpest at the local level.

First, this analysis froegrounds the social, political, and epistemic dimensions of the Lille Vildmose documentation and, in doing so, it gives less weight to the genuine ecological achievements of the project. Lille Vildmose is one of the most significant raised-bog restoration efforts in Northern Europe, and its documented ecological outcomes; restored hydrology, the return of species, expanded areas of active raised bog, are real and substantial. Framing the project's documentation primarily through its silences is a deliberate analytical choice that puts governance and power in the foreground and ecological success in the background.

Second, this analysis is based on the project's own documentation — the Layman's Report, the FINAL Report, and the Natura 2000 Action Plan. These are institutional accounts written to communicate and account for the project. The analysis can therefore identify what these documents say and leave unsaid, and, as the contrast between the Layman's Report and the

FINAL Report shows, the relationship between the two is itself revealing. But these documents cannot give access to the perspectives of the landowners, farmers, and residents, whose relationship to the landscape is not represented in them. An interview-based or ethnographic study would be required to show those perspectives and to test the silences identified here against the lived experiences.

Third, my position as an external analyst, not embedded in the local context and not a native Danish speaker, shapes which silences are visible and which are missed. A researcher embedded in the Lille Vildmose community might notice silences invisible from the outside, or might challenge the ones that are identified here. The findings should therefore be understood as a situated interpretation of the documentation rather than a definitive look of the project.

7.5 Synthesis: Cross-Cutting Problem Representations

The analysis so far has examined each governance level on its own terms: the EU Nature Restoration Law (7.2), the Danish Green Tripartite Agreement (7.3), and the Lille Vildmose project documentation (7.4). This section draws those analyses together. It identifies three problem representations that run across all three levels and that, taken together, hold the multi-level architecture of Danish peatland restoration governance in place. The central argument is that this architecture is sustained not only by formal coordination, like binding targets, national plans, local implementation, but by shared assumptions, shared silences, and shared subject positions that travel from European regulation through national policy to local practice.

7.5.1 Peatlands as a Measurable Climate Problem

Across all three levels, peatlands are represented in much the same way: as degraded carbon reservoirs whose degradation is a measurable climate and biodiversity risk. At the EU level, the NRL defines success through quantified targets and ecological indicators (Article 11(4)). At the national level, the Tripartite Agreement justifies rewetting through its contribution to emissions accounting and shows its ambition in hectares: 140,000 hectares of peatland by 2030. At the local level, the Lille Vildmose documentation measures success through water-level data, species counts, and sphagnum coverage.

This consistency is not a coincidence. It reflects what Jasanoff (2004) calls co-production: scientific knowledge about carbon sequestration has shaped the EU's policy framework, which has in turn shaped the categories through which national and local projects are designed and evaluated. The result is a self-reinforcing logic in which peatlands become to be understood mainly as carbon assets, and in which restoration success is defined by the measurements this logic makes available. The dominance of carbon and habitat metrics is not a neutral technical choice; it foregrounds measurable emissions reductions and ecological indicators over less quantifiable cultural, historical, or aesthetic values (Patel et al., 2025; O'Riordan et al., 2016).

The same depoliticised language appears at each level. The NRL's Recital 12 lists the drivers of degradation as abstract processes, and the Lille Vildmose Layman's Report demonstrates this almost exactly, attributing the loss of raised bogs to "farming, draining, overgrowing and eutrophication" (Layman's Report, 2019). In both cases, drainage appears as a process that simply happened, rather than as a policy that states actively pursued and promoted. What this shared representation excludes, at every level, is the recognition of peatlands as social and cultural landscapes with histories that exceed their carbon content.

7.5.2 The Farmer as Economic Actor

The second cross-cutting representation is the construction of the farmer as a rational economic actor whose participation must be bought and not required. This representation is most concentrated at the national level, but it does not originate there.

It is often assumed that voluntariness is a distinctively Danish feature, rooted in the country's consensual agricultural policy culture (Daugbjerg and Halpin, 2010). The cross-level analysis complicates this assumption. The voluntariness principle is already written into the EU Nature Restoration Law, whose Article 11(6) states that rewetting "remains voluntary" for farmers and private landowners. The Tripartite Agreement does not invent this position; it inherits it and deepens it, committing 40 billion DKK to make voluntary participation attractive and reconstituting the farmer as a "modern land manager" (moderne arealforvalter, pp. 3, 16). The strength of this commitment to voluntary participation is evident even in the way the agreement deals with its most coercive instrument: expropriation is only considered on condition that the expropriated landowners "ikke stilles økonomisk bedre end de, der indgår i frivillige udtagningsordninger" ("are not placed in a better economic position than those who enter

voluntary set-aside schemes," p. 8) In other words: even coercive measures are designed in such a way as to preserve the logic of voluntary participation.

At the local level, the consequence of this logic becomes concrete. The one recorded instance of landowner negotiation at Lille Vildmose ends in a failed discussion, resolved by an unnamed "alternative solution" (FINAL Report, 2020, p. 66), which is a quiet acknowledgement that, when voluntary agreement could not be reached, the project worked around the landowners rather than with or against them.

The result is a governance structure in which landowners' right to continue extracting raw materials is treated at every level as a legitimate starting point, with which restoration must compete through incentives. The costs of the transition are covered by public funds, whilst decision-making power over specific areas remains in private hands. From a political ecology perspective, this is a consistent depoliticisation of environmental governance (Osborne et al., 2021): By framing change as a matter of incentives rather than one of historical responsibility or structural reforms, the governance architecture protects the existing ownership structures at all three levels from being called into question.

7.5.3 Restoration as a Governance Success Story

The third cross-cutting representation is the framing of restoration as a coordinated, evidence-based success. This system is rooted at local level, but derives its legitimacy from the higher levels.

The Lille Vildmose documentation presents the project as a multi-actor success: coordinated between institutional partners, validated by scientific monitoring, and demonstrated through ecological outcomes. This narrative is only possible because of the framings analysed in 7.2 and 7.3. The EU's definition of measurable restoration targets and the national agreement's provision of funding and political legitimacy together create the conditions under which a local project can be told as a success story.
But that success narrative depends on the silences traced throughout the analysis. It silences local conflict, most clearly in the gap between the Layman's Report's claim of landowner "cooperation" and the FINAL Report's record of a failed land purchase. It erases the history of peat-cutting as a livelihood and cultural practice, acknowledging it only as a cause of degradation. And it repositions the local from a site of co-production to a site of

implementation. The Ramsar designation completes this movement, turning a local bog into an internationally significant asset and moving legitimate authority upward, away from the community. The success of restoration governance, in other words, is co-produced across the three levels; and so are its silences. What looks at the local level like a consensual, technical achievement is held up by a governance architecture that, at every scale, highlights measurable ecological outcomes and institutional negotiations while pushing the historical, political, and social dimensions into the background.

Taken together, these three cross-cutting representations support the central claim of this thesis: that peatland restoration in Denmark works as a multi-level, co-produced governance process whose coherence is based not only on formal coordination between scales, but on shared assumptions and shared silences that extend from European regulation to national policy down to local practice. The three theoretical perspectives developed earlier each clarify part of this picture; restoration governance shows the institutional coordination, co-production shows how knowledge and policy shape each other, and political ecology shows whose interests are attended to and whose are made invisible, but it is their combination that reveals how the silences at one level make the success narratives at another possible.

8. Conclusion

This thesis set out to understand peatland restoration in Denmark not as a technical or biophysical process, but as a socio-ecological transformation shaped by knowledge, power, and institutions. Using an integrated framework that combined restoration governance, political ecology, and co-production, and applying Carol Bacchi's "What's the Problem Represented to Be?" approach to policy documents across three governance levels, it examined how the problem of peatland restoration is constructed, and what those constructions make possible and what they exclude.

8.1 Summary of Findings

The document-by-document analysis in Chapter 7 showed that the EU Nature Restoration Law, the Danish Green Tripartite Agreement, and the Lille Vildmose project documentation each

construct the problem of peatland restoration in a distinct but connected way. At the European level, restoration is represented as a measurable, supranationally coordinated governance challenge, defined through binding targets and ecological indicators. At the national level, it is reframed as an economic problem of misaligned incentives, to be solved through voluntary participation and financial compensation. At the local level, it becomes a technical-hydrological intervention, described as a coordinated, evidence-based success.

The synthesis in Section 7.5 demonstrated that these three representations are not independent. They are held together by three cross-cutting framings that travel across all three scales: peatlands as a measurable climate problem, the farmer as a rational economic actor, and restoration as a governance success story. Importantly, these framings are supported not only by what the documents say, but by what they consistently leave unsaid. Across all three levels, the same silences repeat: the historical role of the state in subsidising the drainage it now seeks to reverse, the place-based knowledge of the communities most affected by restoration, and the conflicts and contestation that restoration provokes. The analysis showed, for example, that the voluntariness principle so often treated as a distinctively Danish feature is in fact already embedded in Article 11(6) of the EU regulation, and that the consensual success narrative of the Lille Vildmose Layman's Report conceals a failed land negotiation recorded only in the project's internal reporting.

In answer to the research question, the thesis finds that peatland restoration in Denmark operates as a multi-level, co-produced governance process whose consitency depends as much on shared presuppositions and shared silences as on formal institutional coordination. What appears at the local level as a technical, consensual achievement is made possible by framings established at the European and national levels, and what appears at every level as a neutral, evidence-based policy is in fact a political construction that determines whose knowledge counts and whose interests are left invisible.

8.2 Theoretical Contribution

This thesis makes three contributions. This study makes three contributions. Firstly, it applies political ecology to the context of European peatlands, an environment in which this approach has so far been underutilised, demonstrating that the questions of power, history, and scale that

political ecology raises are as relevant to Danish raised bogs as they are to the tropical forest contexts where the literature has concentrated. Second, it applies co-production to restoration governance, showing empirically how scientific categories, policy instruments, and local practices shape one another across governance levels rather than operating as separate fields. Third, by integrating these two perspectives with restoration governance scholarship and analysing them through the WPR approach, it offers a way of studying restoration that moves beyond asking whether policies work, towards asking how they construct the very problems they claim to solve. The value of the integrated framework lies precisely in this combination: restoration governance reveals the institutional architecture, co-production reveals how knowledge and policy are mutually shaped, and political ecology reveals whose interests that architecture serves and whose it leaves behind.

8.3 Limitations

Several limitations qualify these findings. First, the study is based entirely on document analysis. This makes it possible to examine how official texts construct the problem of restoration, but it cannot access the lived experience of the farmers, landowners, and residents whose relationship to the landscape these documents do not represent. The silences identified here are silences in the documents; whether and how they are experienced on the ground remains beyond the reach of this analysis.

Second, the analysis foregrounds the political, historical, and epistemic dimensions of restoration, and in doing so deliberately gives less weight to the genuine ecological achievements of the cases examined. The Nature Restoration Law is the most ambitious restoration instrument ever adopted at European level, the Tripartite Agreement represents a substantial public investment in landscape change, and Lille Vildmose is a real ecological success. A different analytical lens would have brought these achievements more fully into view.

Third, the study relies on Danish-language policy documents analysed by a non-native speaker, with translations provided by myself, and it takes the English version of the EU regulation as given. Finer discursive nuances, and the multilingual processes through which EU law is negotiated, lie outside its scope. Finally, as a single-case study focused on Denmark, its findings

are analytically rather than statistically generalisable: they offer a framework and a set of insights that can inform the study of peatland governance elsewhere, but the specific Danish political culture of negotiated consensus limits how directly they transfer to other contexts.

8.4 Future Research

These limitations point towards three avenues for future research. First, the document-based findings of this thesis could be tested and extended through interview-based or ethnographic research with the communities affected by rewetting. Such work could establish whether the silences identified in the policy documents correspond to felt exclusions on the ground, and could recover the place-based knowledge that the documents leave to be invisible. Second, comparative research across EU member states, examining how the same Nature Restoration Law is operationalised in countries with different agricultural and political cultures, would clarify which of the patterns found here are specific to Denmark and which reflect the structure of European restoration governance more broadly. Third, because the Tripartite Agreement was concluded only in 2024 and is still being implemented through the local tripartite structures established in 2024, longitudinal research will be needed to trace how its voluntary mechanisms play out in practice, and whether the silences identified at the moment of its articulation become sites of future contestation as implementation unfolds.

8.5 Concluding Remarks

Peatland restoration is often presented as one of the most cost-effective and scientifically straightforward contributions that land use can make to climate and biodiversity goals. This thesis does not disagree with the ecological importance of restoring drained peatlands. What it argues is that the way restoration is framed, across European regulation, national policy, and local practice, is never only technical. It is a political process that defines what counts as success, whose knowledge is treated as legitimate, and whose history is remembered or forgotten. Recognising restoration as a co-produced governance process, rather than a neutral repair of damaged ecosystems, is essential if restoration is to be not only ecologically effective but also socially just. As the European Union embarks on the largest restoration effort in its

history, the question is not only how many hectares can be rewetted, but who is included in deciding what restoration means, and for whom.

Appendix

TABLE 1

	EU Level Nature Restoration Law (2024)	National Level Tripartite agreement (2024)	Local Level LIFE+ Layman´s Report & Natura 2000 Action Plan
Q1: What is the problem?	Biodiversity and climate crisis as systematic failure. Peatlands = measurable emission source. Solution: binding targets (30% by 2030)	Agriculture on organic soils = national emission driver. Problem is economic-technical: wrong incentives for farmers. Solution: compensation and rewetting	The problem is ecological degradation caused by historical drainage and peat extraction. Raised bogs are framed as threatened, rare habitats under EU obligation to protect. The problem is technical-hydrological: water levels are wrong, trees are encroaching, species are declining. Governance failure is not named; the problem appears as purely ecological.
Q2: Presuppositions & conceptual logics	Nature is quantifiable and targetable. Scientific metrics = legitimate policy basis. States are the relevant actors.	Farmer = rational economic actor. Voluntariness is a legitimate governance mode. Property rights are sacrosanct - coercion not possible.	Success = measurable ecological indicators (water levels, vegetation cover, bird counts, hectares restored). The three institutional partners, Naturstyrelsen, Aage V. Jensen Naturfond, City of Aalborg, are assumed to be the legitimate governance actors. *"The project was a collaboration project between the Danish Nature Agency, the Aage V. Jensen Naturfond and the City of Aalborg."* (Layman's Report) Local communities appear only as visitors and volunteers, not as

			decision-makers. Science (monitoring, universities) legitimises the project's success. → co-production: science and governance mutually validate each other
Q4: Silences	Local and indigenous knowledge are entirely absent. Cultural significance of peatland landscapes = not present. Historical drainage subsidies by states go unmentioned.	Who historically benefited from drainage? Social identities of affected communities are absent. Resistance to transition = not addressed.	The most significant silence: local conflict and resistance are entirely absent from the Layman's Report. The document presents the project as consensual and cooperative. The history of peat cutting as a livelihood and cultural practice is acknowledged historically but framed only as a cause of degradation; not as a source of legitimate knowledge or rights. *"Up through the 1800s, trenching and peat cutting took place along the edges of Lille Vildmose." (Layman's Report)* Also absent: who had land-use rights before the 2007 Fredning (nature protection order)? How did the protection affect local landowners? The document mentions landowners only once: in the context of failed land purchase negotiations, resolved by finding "an alternative solution." *"Discussions with the landowners have been held without luck. In the meantime, an alternative solution has been found." (Slutrapport)*

			Non-ecological values such as cultural heritage and landscape identity do not appear. → strongest WPR finding at local level
Q5: Subjectification effects	States = responsible actors. Science = source of legitimacy. Local communities do not appear as subjects.	Farmer = recipient of transition, not knowledge-holder. NGOs and municipalities = implementation partners, not co-producers.	Three subject positions are produced: Institutional partners (Naturstyrelsen, Aage V. Jensen Naturfond, City of Aalborg) = legitimate governance actors with authority and expertise. Scientists and monitors = legitimising evidence. Local community = visitors, volunteers, audience. Vildmoseforeningen (Friends of Lille Vildmose) appears only in the context of guided tours and conservation days and never as a governance partner. "The project has instigated more than 60 guided tours/events/talks for a total audience of more than 5,500 people." (Layman's Report) The Ramsar designation performs a scale transformation: the local bog becomes a site of global climate governance significance, repositioning local actors as custodians of an internationally recognised asset rather than stewards of a local landscape. →

			Politics of Scale argument

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