



State imperatives and hopeful futures in outside lobbying campaigns: A case study on sunseting industries in Finland

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ABSTRACT

The demands for a just and green transition towards more sustainable use of natural resources—both renewable and nonrenewable, living and non-living—are shaping the prospects of local and traditional livelihoods worldwide. While “green” sustainability transitions are expected to create new livelihoods and economies, others are bound to decline or disappear. This article focuses on Finland and its two traditional rural industries—fur farming and peat extraction—whose phase-out is either ongoing or under debate due to various sustainability concerns. Through an analysis of industry lobbying campaigns, I demonstrate how these industries frame themselves as instrumental in fulfilling core state imperatives, including domestic order, external competition, revenue generation, economic growth, legitimation, and environmental conservation. As such, they present themselves as fundamental to the future of the Finnish state, its unique sociocultural characteristics, and its contested welfare society. The article concludes with a discussion on the harmful hopes that these industry lobbying campaigns provoke among both audiences and livelihood practitioners in the face of inevitable sustainability transitions.

1. Introduction

Humanity faces a fundamental crisis, often described as a “triple crisis,” “multicrisis,” or “polycrisis” (UNEP, 2024; Halkos & Asladinis, 2023; Lawrence, 2024). These overlapping notions highlight the complex, multifaceted, and mutually reinforcing nature of different crises—many aggravated by human (in)action—that together pose an existential threat to both human and nonhuman life. The recognition of the urgency to address these crises has manifested in policy programs and pledges ranging from emission reductions and pandemic prevention to fostering a new, greener, and more sustainable economy. These initiatives are known to have uneven socioeconomic implications across time and space (Cha et al., 2022; Golubchikov & O’Sullivan 2020) and to have potential to send “older, well-established industries,” often with large assets and strong connections to political elites, into decline (Verrier & Strachan, 2022).

Industry declines and phase-outs threaten planned sustainability transitions, as stakeholders dependent on these industries have the tendency to mobilized various strategies to slow or block such transitions (Markard et al., 2020). These strategies include generating public support for industries facing phase-outs, emphasizing economic losses, and framing phase-outs as “society-wide threats” (Kalt, 2021). Ibert et al. (2019) refer to such strategies as dissociations, which can be used by diverse actors to promote their values and stabilize desired valuation regimes. Different industries have a long history of lobbying for political and public support

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when facing legislative or societal changes that could impact their operations (Livesey, 2002; Supran & Oreskes, 2021; Apollonio & Bero, 2007). Unlike traditional advertising, outside lobbying aims to raise awareness and shape opinions and societal attitudes relevant to industry prospects (Kollman, 1998; Dür & Mateo 2023; Rasmussen et al., 2017; De Bruycker & Beyers, 2015). This type of attitude-shaping is practiced by corporate actors and industry-wide lobbying organizations, both of which are deeply intertwined in political and corporate networks.

This article empirically analyzes how hopes for continuing “business-as-usual” are maintained amidst increasing demands for industry phase-outs due to sustainability transitions. It contributes to the growing body of literature on hope in sustainability transitions, where hope is conceptualized in contradictory terms. On one hand, hope can fuel action and bring about desired, more sustainable futures (e.g., Moellendoft, 2024; Cassegård, 2023; Ojala, 2012). On the other hand, false, misguided, or harmful hopes can maintain the status quo, hinder change, and “contribute to the stabilization of the order which they intend to attack” (Blühdorn, 2017, 58; also e.g., Lindroth & Sinevaara-Niskanen, 2020; Marlon et al., 2019; Foster, 2017).

This article focuses on two recent industry lobbying campaigns in Finland: the “Turveinfo” [peat info] campaign from 2016 by the Finnish Bioenergy Association and the “100 faktaa” [100 facts] campaign launched by the Finnish Fur Breeders’ Association in 2019. It provides an empirical analysis of how traditional livelihoods and industries, now widely deemed sunseting, argue for their relevance, importance, and necessity in a rapidly changing world. While not explicitly focused on hope, the analysis of how these campaigns construct futures in which such industries play significant roles contributes to scholarly discussions about the roles of hope in stagnating or preventing societal change and sustainability transitions. Despite its national focus, the article sheds light on similar negotiations regarding the future prospects of livelihoods at stake in the broader sustainability transition and the justifications they provide for their relevance to both citizens and the state.

2. A brief history of Finland’s peat extraction and fur farming

Ibert et al. (2019) have aptly noted that “manifold economic, political, historical, and geographical contingencies have worked in conjunction to create today’s global economy.” In the Finnish context, these contingencies and configurations contributed to the emergence of fur farming and peat extraction as ‘traditional’ industries that historically provided much-needed jobs and income for rural regions, as well as important tax revenues for the state. Additionally, energy peat—extracted from Finland’s vast peatlands—was for decades considered a vital part of the national energy mix (Ruuskanen, 2010; author 2024, forthcoming; Karkinen, 2009). Beyond their perceived importance and benefits, the state-coordinated rise and impending fall of Finland’s fur and peat industries have been intertwined with similar historical and contemporary developments. Both industries began in the early 20th century; their development into large-scale industries and significant rural employers occurred with generous state support, both monetary and symbolic. Their positions in Finnish society have also been defended by remarkably similar arguments (Karkinen, 2009; Albrecht, 2018; Lempinen, 2022a). Moreover, the threat of phase-out for both industries has occurred simultaneously and on similar environmental and climate-related grounds.

While the inhabitants of Finland have relied on the fur of wild animals for warmth and shelter for thousands of years, the origins of fur farming—raising animals in captivity solely or primarily for their fur—in Finland dates back to the early 1900s (Karkinen, 2009; Latva, 2020). During its first decades, fur farming remained a small-scale, subsistence-like livelihood for relatively few. However, a combination of importing animals and practices from abroad, along with large-scale investments by municipalities, regions, and the state in diversifying the economies of the rapidly depopulating rural Finland, contributed to the sector’s explosive growth during the 1960s–70s (ibid.). By the 1980s, fur farming had become synonymous with rural employment, tax, and export revenues—arguments that continue to justify its existence (cf. Lempinen, 2022a)—making Finland the “great power of fur production” (Karhula et al., 2008, 9) it remains today. The national history of the peat industry follows similar trajectories. Early efforts in the first decades of the 20th century to turn peat into a significant source of energy and employment largely failed, but state-led efforts in the 1970s made the peat industry both an economically and symbolically important rural livelihood and a crucial element in the energy mix of the import-dependent Finnish state (Ruuskanen, 2010; Albrecht, 2018). As a result, Finland became—and has remained—among the top peat-extracting nations in the world (Ruuskanen, 2010).

However, the analogous nature of fur farming and peat extraction is not limited to their temporal parallelism or their importance in sustaining rural Finland through the income, employment, and sense of meaning they have created. Their decline has also followed largely comparable trajectories. For the peat industry, the first signs of downfall came subtly with the increasing influence of climate change mitigation as an energy political priority, first in discourse in the early 2000s and later in actual energy policy during the 2010s (cf. Ruuskanen, 2010; Albrecht, 2018). For peat, this process culminated in 2019 when the Finnish government announced its plan to phase out the use of energy peat after a 10-year transition period during which its use would be halved in a controlled manner (Finnish Government, 2019, 37). At the time the transition was announced, peat amounted to around 4 % of Finland’s primary energy consumption and generated only 2500 jobs nationwide (Soimakallio et al., 2020; Korhonen et al., 2021). Since then, these numbers have only continued to dwindle.

While no decision to phase out fur farming has been made, its economic significance has steadily declined: by 2022, it contributed fewer than 1500 jobs and 126 million euros in net export revenue (Vinnari, 2022). Fur farming has been contested on ethical and animal welfare grounds for several decades (Warwick et al., 2023; Kleibert et al., 2020; Linzey & Linzey, 2023; Emberley, 1998; for Finland, see Karkinen, 2009; Parikka, 1998; Latva, 2020). During these decades, many European countries have either restricted or banned fur farming citing similar concerns (Kivelä, 2017). In early 2023, an EU-wide citizen petition to ban fur farming, with over 1.6 million signatories, was delivered to the European Commission. Bird flu infections detected at nearly a hundred Finnish farms in the same year have only intensified the public debate about the justifications for and the future of the industry (Warwick et al., 2023;

Peacock & Barclay, 2023). Despite their decline—initially gradual in the 2000s and more rapid in recent years—both fur farming and peat extraction remain perceived as important industries in the poorly diversified rural economies.

3. Key industries and core imperatives

In modern societies, mass media outlets remain among the “most important discursive fields where competing moral evaluations are presented” (Ylä-Anttila & Luhtakallio, 2016). These discursive battles are waged equally in journalistic and sponsored media content, both of which are fundamental in generating and maintaining the political attention that many interest and lobbying groups rely on to advance their goals (De Bruycker & Beyers, 2015; Rasmussen et al., 2017). In the context of fur farming and peat industry campaigns, their visibility in prominent media outlets serves and promotes two interlinked goals, both well-established in existing scholarship focusing on the interactions between (industry) interest groups and the public sphere. Firstly, such industry campaigns represent a form of outside lobbying aimed at raising issue awareness and shaping citizen views to mobilize the public to influence political decision-makers and gain public support (Kollman, 1998; Dür & Mateo, 2023; Rasmussen et al., 2017; De Bruycker & Beyers, 2015). The functions of such “legislative advocacy” (Hall & Reynolds, 2012) or issue advertising are not limited to attempts to shape policy outcomes but also to legitimize and justify industry presence and actions. They also serve to build and maintain—or, in some cases, retain—the perceptions of these industries as socially acceptable, benevolent, and legitimate actors, granting and upholding their social license to operate (Egeland, 2023; Taken et al., 2014).

In the context of state-established and historically state-dependent industries or livelihoods, legitimacy becomes a concern not only in terms of public perception but also for the state itself. In their analyses of social movements and their relations with the state and its constituents, Dryzek et al. (2002) relied on a conceptual set of “core imperatives” that refer to the “functions that governmental structures have to carry out to ensure their own longevity and stability,” whose safeguarding will override any other societal preferences (ibid., 662–663; also Hausknost & Hammond, 2019). For Dryzek and his colleagues, these imperatives—maintaining domestic order, competing and surviving internationally, generating revenue to secure these tasks, supporting economic growth, and public legitimacy—reflect both the evolution of the Western nation-state, each imperative reflecting the expansion of the perceived tasks of the state, as well as the variety of functions and fields across which the contemporary state is required to operate (ibid., 2002). From the perspective of social movements or interest group lobbies, these imperatives are of fundamental importance, as discursively aligning with them maximizes their advocacy potential. Conversely, if a connection to these imperatives cannot be established, the attention given to any advocacy effort can remain symbolic or marginal (cf. Dryzek et al., 2002, 663). The idea of having to align with a set of fundamental core imperatives is of interest both from the perspectives of interest group outside lobbying and in terms of industries’ social license to operate. When publicly positioning themselves as beneficial or even as prerequisites for fulfilling core state functions, the campaigning industries are resorting to a powerful rhetorical tool aimed at presenting their interests and existence as synonymous with nothing less than that of the state itself.

The increasing awareness of the economic and existential threats posed by global environmental degradation and climate change—or the “triple planetary crisis” of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution (UNEP, 2024)—has given rise to discussions about a potential sixth core imperative of environmental conservation as a key function of the state and as instrumental for fulfilling all other state imperatives. While the degree to which conservation has become institutionalized among the core imperatives of the state or whether it remains locked in a “zero-sum game” with the imperative of economic growth continues to be debated (Dryzek et al., 2002, 663; Hausknost & Hammond, 2019; Hausknost & Hammond, 2019), it is nonetheless noteworthy to scrutinize to what extent and in what ways the environmental aspect or “imperative” is a factor when industry-wide phase-outs motivated specifically by unsustainable industry practices are debated.

4. Data and method

Empirically, this article relies on two notable Finnish industry outside lobbying campaigns—one promoting peat extraction and the other promoting fur farming—run by their respective industry-wide lobbying organizations: The Finnish Bioenergy Association and the Finnish Fur Breeders’ Association. The peat industry campaign, “Turveinfo” [Peat Info], was launched in 2016 by the Finnish Bioenergy Association as a series of four posters rolled out as full-page advertisements in the nation’s leading newspaper, Helsingin Sanomat, in other print media outlets, and on JCDecaux outdoor posters at the busiest bus stops in Helsinki. The campaign’s aim, stated across the four published posters, was to inform citizens about the broad-ranging benefits of peat energy and encourage them to appeal to the nation’s politicians for positive changes in national energy policies. Meanwhile, the fur farming lobbying campaign, “100 faktaa” [100 Facts], was established as an online information campaign by the Finnish Fur Breeders’ Association in 2019. The campaign aimed to increase the societal acceptability of the fur livelihood and improve the industry’s operating prospects by enhancing the “knowledge level” of the general public (Finnish Fur Breeders’ Association, 2022). In practice, the campaign was implemented online by updating a series of originally intended 100, but later extended to 150, ‘facts’—short claims about various topics related to fur farming as an industry and livelihood—over two years.

The campaign materials were analyzed using qualitative content analysis, with the conceptual framework of state core imperatives playing a crucial role in guiding the analytical gaze. In practice, the analysis involved systematically categorizing the claims presented in the peat posters and fur facts under the set of six core imperatives suggested by Dryzek et al. (2002). This analytical framework of core imperatives, which departs from more established approaches focusing on analyzing strategies utilized by lobbying groups (cf. e. g., Supran & Oreskes, 2021; Arjonranta et al., 2017; Taken et al., 2014; Livesey, 2002), took shape in an iterative process during the first rounds of reading the campaign materials. During this process, the ways in which the campaign materials echoed the historically

intimate connections between the two industries and the Finnish state were first observed.

In analyzing the fur campaign, the ‘facts’ that focused on the qualities and characteristics of fur as a material—e.g., its different color variations—were excluded from the analysis as they were descriptive and made no reference beyond the fur product itself. While the purpose of this article is not to explicitly compare the argumentation or justification of the two industry campaigns, both campaigns are nonetheless discussed together in each section to highlight similarities and differences. The aim of the following analysis is not to address the truth value of the campaigns, to analyze the essence of the state or to evaluate the campaigns’ impact on Finnish policies or public opinion. Instead, its focus lies on campaign argumentation and on how the campaigns promote and justify a vision of a future Finland where currently widely contested fur farming and peat extraction are still practiced.

5. Results

The results section is structured around the different core imperatives and how the campaigns position the livelihoods in relation to these narratives. The closely interlinked imperatives of maintaining domestic societal order and surviving in international competition are discussed together in [Section 5.1](#). Similarly, the economic imperatives—those focusing on raising state revenue and securing economic growth—are grouped together in [Section 5.2](#). Meanwhile, owing to their strong and multidimensional presence in the campaign materials, the core imperatives of legitimation and environmental sustainability are discussed separately in their dedicated sections, 5.3 and 5.4, respectively.

5.1. Maintaining domestic order in an unpredictable world

Among the most fundamental tasks of a state is to maintain order within its borders and promote its position as an independent state in the international system among its competitors ([Dryzek et al., 2002](#)). In the lobbying campaigns, both fur farming and peat extraction are framed as beneficial for achieving these goals. In terms of domestic order, these industries work on two mutually supportive fronts. Firstly, both fur farming and peat extraction are entwined with the nation’s history and self-understanding. For example, the roots of fur farming are traced “deep in Finnish society” (#1), emphasizing the generations of families that have practiced the livelihood (#142) and its hundred years of history, which continue to be reflected in place names, heralds, and vocabulary today (#44, #5). The connections between northern humans and fur are traced back to ancient Egypt (#46), northern indigenous peoples (#5), and furriers as one of the oldest existing professions in the world (#105), weaving together the fates of Finns and fur animals over millennia.

A similar understanding of peat as part of the ‘natural order of things’ is reflected in the campaign lobbying for better prospects of peat extraction. Simply put, “peat has a positive impact on every Finn’s everyday life” (poster 1). The wordplay “Suo on osa Suomea” [peatlands are a part of Finland] constructs peatlands as nothing less than an organic part of Finland, indicated by the inclusion of the word “peatland” (suo) even in the country’s name (posters 1–4). Visually, this symbolism is depicted with a drawing of the national symbol, the Maiden of Finland, with her long blond hair, in her national dress, holding the Finnish flag (though with the head of a donkey—a theme revisited in section 4.3; poster 2), framing peat in essential terms for the nation, its history and identity.

In addition to their sociocultural significance, both peat extraction and fur farming are positioned as contributing to maintaining order in broader Finnish society. The campaign materials frame both industries in terms of their economic contributions and positive employment impacts, vital for maintaining peace and stability in the nation’s internal affairs (#16, #61, #18, posters 2 and 3). The jobs provided by fur farming to “many immigrants” as a means of integration (#104)—a highly politicized theme in Finnish political debates—are explicitly presented as a justification for the industry’s presence. In the context of peat extraction, its contributions to maintaining the nation’s crumbling welfare society and everyday energy supply security are highlighted. Utilizing peat would keep the nation’s pipes from freezing, lights from going dark, and heaters from turning off (poster 4); it would “reopen the closed clinics, pay for Sunday salaries, invest in education, safeguard kindergartens and pension payments,” and address needs from railways to bridges and fighter planes (poster 2).

National defense and security are also key themes in the peat industry’s relation to national security. The challenge of the small and remote state of Finland surviving internationally is explicitly addressed in the fourth poster titled “Do not feed the bear,” illustrated with the Russian bear metaphor wearing a green military cap, holding a fork and knife, mouth open, teeth sharp, and drool splashing. The poster frames energy import dependence, especially on Russian imports, as an existential question for Finland “at the mercy of others” (poster 4). Energy supply disruptions are described as “very concrete and potentially calamitous” (poster 4). Finland’s reluctance to utilize its peat reserves—a policy stance the campaign aims to reverse—is framed as “a ticking time bomb,” an existential survival question for the nation and its citizens (poster 4).

In the fur farming lobbying campaign, international competition is not as acutely present(ed). However, fur farming’s significance extends beyond the domestic sphere. Participation in international fur trade since the first century “brought remote Finland to the world map” (#47). The country’s “fur riches” historically contributed to neighboring countries seeking ownership of Finnish lands (*ibid.*). The global fur farming industry is portrayed as a competitive arena, with Finland faring well alongside “other strong fur producing countries,” being among the world’s largest fox hide producers (#84). Similarly, the “national treasure” of peat (poster 3), worth twice as much as the North Sea’s known oil reserves (poster 2), could make Finns “richer than Norwegians” (poster 2). Instead, the nation’s choice not to utilize these reserves positions it as an international leader in another respect—“the fooliest nation in the world” (poster 2).

5.2. Economic imperatives

Much like the core imperatives of domestic and international order—both firmly entwined with the ways in which Peat Info and 100 Facts campaigns frame their respective industries—the fundamental goals of raising state revenue and securing continued economic growth, widely embraced in capitalist societies, are two sides of the same coin. While the imperative of raising revenues focuses on the funds gathered by the state to support its functions and the national economy, the imperative of economic growth embraces the idea of continued economic growth as a broader, societally shared value (Dryzek et al., 2002). Unsurprisingly, both fur farming and peat extraction are framed by the campaigns as vitally important and influential industries that support these essential state tasks on several mutually reinforcing fronts.

The contribution of fur farming to the national economy is described in significant terms which bear little resemblance to national statistics about its economic importance (cf. Vinnari, 2022). The direct economic impacts of fur farming in rural Finland are framed as substantial: when "farms buy the feed from producers, who in turn buy raw materials also from local grain, meat, and fish producers" (#61) and employ "the drivers of feed trucks, fur artisans, and vets" (#16), the fur farming industry—already employing "over 5000 individuals" and "family entrepreneurs" (#16)—appears much larger, indirectly employing "three times more people than it does directly" (#61). Besides income taxes paid by those engaged in the industry, the tax revenues, social security payments (#18), and hundreds of millions in export revenues (#51) help keep the national economy running. In the campaign, the tax revenues generated by fur farming are compared to those of a mid-size municipality (#18), and the export revenues from fur sales exceed those from grain imports (#51). Overall, the industry and its contribution to the national economy are framed in weighty terms, aligning its existence with the benefit of the state both today and well into the future.

The economic significance of peat is framed on a different scale: its (potential) worth is described as "hundreds of billions of euros in value" (poster 2). The lagging national economy, government budget cuts, and grim future prospects have led to a situation where the "basic pillars of welfare Finland are in need of being dismantled" (poster 3). "Welfare needs money" (poster 3), but the country is running out of it; without peat, Finland is taking on more debt, importing "expensive energy from abroad," and still "sinking faster than ever" (poster 2). Peat would—"if only allowed"—provide not just a source of energy but a world-class raw material for high-tech industries and work for "thousands and thousands of Finns" (posters 2 and 3). Only with peat could "employment, national economy and Finland", all with grim future prospects and with little hope, be lifted from this proverbial bog (posters 1 and 3).

The campaigns frame both industries as crucial for securing state revenue through the employment and income they generate, justifying their maintenance in terms of enabling economic activity and growth. The 100 faktaa fur farming campaign portrays the fur farming industry as a thriving, highly professionalized rural livelihood fully compliant with the demands of a modern global market economy and its imperative of generating, sustaining, and enabling economic growth without undue state intervention (Dryzek et al., 2002; Hausknost & Hammond, 2019). Over the decades, fur farming has centralized and professionalized, with farmers preparing for its ebbs and flows (#3, #43, #112), and the company auctioning furs has become a "leading-scale international fur auction" (#113). Similarly, the peat industry—if supported and promoted—could produce top-quality raw materials with high added value for international markets and cutting-edge industries, from aviation to space research (poster 3). Such depictions of these industries as bringing added value and having future economic potential stand in stark contrast with demands for their phase-out as unprofitable and unsustainable.

5.3. Questioning legitimacy

The core imperative of legitimation refers to the ways in which "the elected legislative and executive powers [...] are accountable to the entire citizenry and need to further some kind of publicly mediated common good" beyond the interests of private capital (Hausknost & Hammond, 2019, 4). In the context of industries historically closely associated with the state but now often in conflict with the political priorities and commitments of that same state, the question of legitimacy is both fascinating and complex. While it can safely be stated that the aim of both campaigns is to increase societal legitimacy in the eyes of their audiences and Finnish citizens, the ways in which the campaigns relate to the legitimacy of the state itself are fundamentally different.

In lobbying for fur farming, the legitimacy of the state is given a defining role in legitimizing fur farming and its contemporary practices. While the campaign frames fur farming as an industry that enjoys broad support from the nation's citizens (#68; #70), the weightiest arguments for its defense are derived from the "several authorities of the government" that continue to sanction its existence: regional administrative offices, economic and employment officials, taxation authorities, the national food authority, veterinary experts, prestigious universities and research institutions, and even construction supervisory boards and the fire and rescue department are singled out (#78, #79, #119). The practices of Finnish fur farming are also framed as enjoying international support from Finland's key political allies and affiliations, ranging from the European Commission to UN-led and monitored business initiatives (#45, #83, #60, #116). Under industry-specific, national, and international frameworks, justifications ranging from certifications covering all aspects of fur trade and life on the fur farm (e.g., #66, #67, #108, #146) to regular audits, end-product traceability (#64, #67, #85, #148), and even COVID compliance (#114, #129, #134, #137, #147) abound across the campaign materials, demonstrating the wealth of prestigious organizations whose support the industry has gained. Thus, questioning the practices of fur farming would mean questioning the authority and legitimacy of all the entities whose frameworks continue to allow for its existence.

While the societal legitimation of fur farming is built on the legitimacy that state actors and authorities enjoy, the peat industry lobbying campaign is built on the argument that Finland's peat-related policies are not legitimate and should urgently be reassessed. The second poster of the peat campaign is provocatively titled "The Fooliest Nation in the World?" and equally provocatively depicts the Maiden of Finland—the nation's national symbol—with the head of a donkey as a visual metaphor for her stupidity and simple-

mindfulness. The concrete consequences of this perceived stupidity are embodied in the drawing of an elderly man illustrating the third campaign poster: hunched in his wheelchair, all alone in the dark, left to his own devices amidst the collapsing healthcare system of a former welfare state now crumbling due to lack of financial resources (poster 3). “Now would be the time, if a Finn would be inclined to do such things, to rise to the barricades” (ibid.) and change the national policy stance that has made the use of peat in Finland “unfortunately difficult” (poster 4). As the government or the nation’s policymakers cannot be trusted to rectify this issue on their own, it will come down to citizens and their actions to determine whether “Finns will freeze during the next Siberian colds” (poster 4). This makes the future of energy peat a question of nothing less than the legitimacy of the Finnish state in the eyes of its own citizens.

5.4. *The imperative of sustainability*

The degree to which environmental conservation has become an equal imperative to other core imperatives of the state remains debated both in scholarly literature as well as in more practical terms across political arenas (Dryzek et al., 2002; Hausknost & Hammond, 2019; Schlosberg et al., 2003). However, prominence and rhetorical weight of environmentally oriented justifications in both campaigns warrants further scrutiny of how environmental themes—more commonly associated with demands to phase out rather than support these industries—have come to play such a prominent role.

In 100 Facts, the “sustainability imperative”—the need to account for environmental, climate, and other health and welfare concerns (Hausknost & Hammond, 2019)—is almost omnipresent in two distinct yet mutually supportive ways. A significant share of the campaign ‘facts’ is dedicated to addressing issues related to animal welfare and the environmental impacts of the fur farming industry. These facts construct an industry deeply concerned with and heavily investing in animal welfare, spending “over one million euros annually” (#63) to improve the well-being of animals through developing practices and funding research. The animals receive expert attention and regular health care (e.g., #21, #22, #25, #121), are fed a balanced diet (e.g., #2, #26, #28), often “optimized” for the species in question or even for an individual animal (#28, #135, #140); they have access to drinking water (#4, #125) and are allowed behaviors typical for their species such as nesting, playing, and monitoring their environment (e.g., #11, #15, #23, #89, #97). The non-mammalian environment is also considered: shadow houses are designed to prevent the animals’ excretions from ending up in nature (#55), thus solving an environmental problem associated with the industry since its early decades (cf. Latva, 2020).

In addition to emphasizing industry practices that minimize its negative impacts on farmed animals and the surrounding environment, the campaign also positions fur farming as a solution to several broader sustainability concerns. By catching fish from the Baltic Sea to feed the fur animals, the industry helps remove phosphorus from the Baltic Sea and is committed to restoring its ecological balance (#2, #5, #24). The phosphorus-rich waste of the fur animals is then used as a nutrient-rich fertilizer (#5, #10, #49, #71) in the true sense of the emerging circular economy. Indeed, fur farming is framed as a natural “part of nature’s nutrient cycle” (#58); the industry also utilizes by-products from other industries (#39, #73, #79), reducing the overall waste generated by different industrial activities.

As a material, fur is framed as compliant with the demands of the new, greener economy: all parts of the animal are used (#5, #40), and the product itself is nearly “eternal” (#7), recyclable and modifiable (e.g., #13, #17, #52, #53), and free from microplastics (#7, #17)—another major issue of our time. Additionally, fur farming contributes to the green energy transition by providing roofs for photovoltaic installations, exploring the prospects of biogas development, and recycling animal fat for sulfur-free biodiesel production (#35; #37, #58; #117). Overall, the campaign facts depict fur farming not as the sustainability problem it is often framed as, but instead as a solution to Finland’s sustainability concerns.

In the Peat Info campaign, one of the posters specifically rebuts widespread environmental concerns related to peat extraction. Before climate change began to dominate energy political agendas, the societal license to operate for the national peat industry was mainly debated based on the impacts of draining peatlands and extracting peat on Finland’s rivers and lakes: the importance of peatlands as carbon sinks has broadly acknowledged in Finnish societal debates only in the 2020 s (cf. Lempinen, 2022b; Albrecht, 2018; Heikkilä & Lindholm, 2008). The campaign poster titled “Opinions are on the surface—facts can be found from the bottom” features a drawing of a man in a brown business suit kneeling by a lake with his head submerged, targeting concerns Finns have had about the impact of peat extraction on waterways that are “estimated to be downgraded” as lakes are “feared to be filled with humus-rich mud.” In Peat Info campaign, these concerns are also alleviated by (mis)citing an individual study whose results placed the blame for hydrological degradation on the forest industry instead. Thus, the conclusion is drawn that peat extraction has “a clean record” in terms of its impact on waterways. Another environmental dimension highlighted in the campaigns is the share of peatland area in active peat extraction—1 % of Finland’s peatland areas. Sustainability claims cannot be made in much more direct terms than by stating that Finland’s “peat use is on a sustainable basis” (poster 2). Together, the campaigns refute the need for phase-outs specifically on sustainability-related grounds through framing the industries not only as a compliant with but at times even working in favor of broader sustainability transition agendas.

6. Discussion

The empirical analysis above has highlighted the manifold and oftentimes overlapping ways in which the sunset industries of peat extraction and fur farming have argued for their relevance amidst societal and political changes. These changes have rendered the formerly prestigious industries, which were closely affiliated with the state, under the threat of being phased out by political decisions made by the very same state. Overall, the two analyzed campaigns—one advocating fur farming, the other peat extraction—represent a massive communication effort to maintain and further reinforce the connection between the fate of rural Finland and Finland as a state.

The campaigns frame the livelihoods as instrumental for all aspects of the state's activities: maintaining order inside the country and outside its borders and securing economic welfare and growth. Furthermore, they engage in discussions around legitimacy, environmental, and broader sustainability concerns, thus speaking to all the set of updated six core imperatives of Dryzek and his colleagues.

While the ways in which the campaigns argue for the economic, political, and sociocultural importance of the industries unsurprisingly bear great resemblance, some notable differences remain. These largely relate to the tone of argumentation: whereas the strong expressions of the peat campaign could well be described as affective (see [Arjoranta et al., 2017](#); [Lempinen, 2017](#)), the fur industry argues for its existence in more dispassionate, (seemingly) fact-based terms (see also [Lempinen, 2022a](#)). These rhetorical differences reflect and construct a stance of a certain kind, especially in relation to the core imperative of legitimacy, in the context of which another marked difference between the campaigns becomes visible. The Peat Info campaign directly constructs a conflictual relationship with the state and its energy policies, seeking to mobilize its audience as members of civil society to actively change these policies and questioning the legitimacy of the existing regime that continues to allow the destruction of the Finnish welfare state by stubbornly sticking with its anti-peat policies. Such demands for policy change are absent from the fur farming lobbying campaign. Instead, it constructs the legitimacy of fur farming as almost synonymous with that of the state, its authorities, and the international agreements and institutions it has entered. The legitimacy of the broadly criticized practices of farming animals for their fur on an industrial scale is derived from the legitimacy of the state and its laws and authorities that continue to sanction them.

[Dür and Mateo \(2023\)](#) have noted that societal “politicization makes outside lobbying in favor of a policy opposed by many citizens potentially costly.” Both fur farming and peat industries have nonetheless embarked on this mission in a societal context that has become highly polarized in terms of the livelihoods' societal license to operate. Even more interestingly, both campaigns have specifically targeted *the* sustainability-related concerns that have questioned their societal license to operate. By assuming the sustainability-focused rhetoric of their societal ‘opponents,’ both industries are employing lobbying strategies observed in the oil industry's campaigns (cf. e.g., [Livesey, 2002](#); [Supran & Oreskes, 2021](#)). For the peat industry, this means disputing the role of peat extraction in degrading the hydrological conditions of the nation's rivers and underlining the “sustainable basis” that peat extraction lies on in a country with one of the largest peatland areas in the world. For fur farming, it translates into emphasizing issues related to animal welfare and the contributions that fur farming can make to solving other environmental crises of our time, ranging from microplastics to the circular economy and the green energy transition, and even salvaging the suffering Baltic Sea. The emphasis on sustainability-related concerns—present in both campaigns but especially prominent in the fur farming one—also speaks to the theory of core imperatives by underlining the (discursive) weight that environmental, climate, and other sustainability issues need to be allocated in public political persuasion.

While assessing the ‘success’ of the campaigners' endeavors is beyond the scope of this article, it is nonetheless valuable to reflect on their potential influence in societal or political contexts. In terms of societal attitudes, both fur farming and peat extraction have enjoyed steadily shrinking support, although the Russian war in Ukraine has temporarily favored the use of peat as an energy source (cf. author 2024, forthcoming). Politically, the decision to phase out energy peat use was reached in 2019, less than three years after the campaign; meanwhile, fur farming continues to enjoy the support of ruling political parties despite facing an acute threat of a bird flu pandemic ([Peacock & Barclay, 2023](#); [Warwick et al., 2023](#)). However, what is noteworthy is that the campaign arguments—regardless of their truth value—have been observed to continue to circulate among those ‘defending’ the livelihoods, among policymakers and industry practitioners alike (cf. [Lempinen & Vainio, 2023](#); [Finnish Fur Breeders' Association, 2022](#)). While some of this circulation is most likely strategic in nature – targeted to those ‘outside’ the livelihoods with the aim to argue for their relevance – the campaigns can also have served to nurture and stimulate hopes about better industry and living prospects among the livelihood practitioners. As such, they offer yet another example of the ways in which harmful, misguided or false hopes can be constructed and mobilized to hinder and prevent change and serve stagnation and status quo instead of acknowledging the urgent need to rethink personal career prospects, industry visions, and regional socioeconomic development policies for a more sustainable future (cf. e.g. [Blühdorn, 2017](#); [Marlon et al., 2019](#); [Foster, 2017](#)).

7. Conclusion

This article has taken an empirically grounded focus on how “traditional” livelihoods at risk of being phased out as part of the broader societal project of sustainability transition argue for their future. While it has relied on the theory of a set of core imperatives that have been argued to form the priorities of any modern (welfare) state ([Dryzek et al., 2002](#)), its purpose has not been to assess whether these imperatives actually inform the core of state actions or to analyze the essence of the “state” itself. Rather, it aims to use the set of assumed state priorities to analyze how sunseting industries strive to remain relevant amidst shifting policy priorities in a rapidly changing world that is not in their favor. In analyzing the ways in which industry lobbying campaigns operate, the article also contributes to investigating the roles that hopes—both industrial and political—can serve to hinder and prevent sustainability transitions and economic and societal transformations.

Social movements' success has been observed to depend on the extent to which they succeed in positioning themselves regarding state core imperatives. However, this article has demonstrated that these core imperatives can also be relevant for understanding sunseting industry lobbying campaigns. Although this article has focused on two distinctively Finnish livelihoods whose significance—in terms of economy, employment, or identity—is negligible outside a handful of (predominantly European) nations, its findings nonetheless shed light on similar ‘negotiations’ between the future prospects of livelihoods at stake in the broader sustainability transition and the justifications they make for their relevance in the eyes of both citizens and the state. The ways in which fur farming and peat extraction are framed in terms of the manifold contributions they make to the Finnish state, its sectors, and broader

society can illuminate broader themes at play in livelihood and sustainability transitions and related societal argumentation.

If and when industries under the threat of being phased out frame themselves as essential for securing state functions and goals, they also succeed in framing their phase-out as synonymous with a threat to the same state interests and imperatives. This perceived, nearly existential threat is only further underlined by the affective dimensions that intertwine the industries with the nation's self-understanding. The loss of a "traditional" industry and livelihood is constructed not only as risking the state's ability to perform its core tasks but also as jeopardizing the state's and its citizens' understanding of who or what they are. Paradoxically, focusing on the perceived threat posed by industry phase-out and constructing hopes about a future where these industries and those dependent on them can continue to blossom obscures the very real threats posed by allowing such industries to continue their environmentally harmful and, in the long run, potentially deadly operations.

In observable terms, the two campaigns and the societal debates that followed them have made little difference in significantly increasing the social acceptance of either industry. At best, they have served to uphold and reinforce the beliefs and hopes of those already supportive of these livelihoods, as demonstrated by the ways in which claims from both campaigns have continued to circulate among industry practitioners and politicians. These hopes—unfounded in many respects—are "harmful" not only because they can work to delay industry transitions, but they are especially detrimental to the individuals and communities that have economically, socially, or culturally depended on fur farming or peat extraction as a source of income, identity, and meaning. Disentangling the multigenerational cultural ties that livelihood practitioners and their communities have had with industries that once saved them from economic and community decline is a slow and painful process, even when the direction of change is uncontested. Systematic campaigning contesting such transitions only makes the process more costly, not only in economic but also in personal terms.

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The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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