A matter of trust

Social interaction in a nature conservation issue in the Eastern slopes of Lake Vättern

Brita Berglund

Author: Brita Berglund

Title: A matter of trust: Social interaction in a nature conservation issue in the Eastern slopes of Lake Vättern

Keywords: Conflict, dialogue, trust, social interaction, nature conservation

Abstract

Nature conservation issues are often complex and difficult to handle. Different actors and interests are involved and it is generally agreed that constructive interaction is a crucial part of dealing with these issues. According the theory which forms the basis of this thesis, conflict is defined as social interaction during which the actors trust in the interaction is decreasing. Signs of conflict and diminished trust in the interaction are that these actors make attempts to change the situation and some of these attempts can lead to increased conflict.

The aim of this thesis is to describe the social interaction that takes place when people move from conflict to dialogue. A qualitative case study of a nature conservation issue in *Östra Vätterbranterna*, an area east of Lake Vättern, is presented. The parties involved managed to make the transition from conflict to dialogue in the period under study – from 1998 to 2004. The conflict concerned forest production versus conservation of woodland key habitats. To deal with the matter, 'Project Östra Vätterbranterna' was initiated in 1998 with the participation of five (later seven) organisations, representing the interests of different stakeholders. Representatives for the organisations involved were interviewed.

The study shows many examples of attempts to change the situation during the conflict period. They are e.g. actors withdrawing from the interaction; attempts at moving the issue to another arena; changing or questioning the credibility, legitimacy or identity of others; trying to increase own credibility and legitimacy; and even the occasional use of violence. It also shows that, at the end of the study period, the interactions between the same parties had dialogic qualities and were characterised by trust. Working from the assumption that particular forms of interaction contribute to increased trust, certain trust-promoting interactions are identified and described. They are for example: meta-communication; establishing a legitimate arena for dealing with the issue; facilitation of project group meetings; and concerted attempts to reduce misunderstandings. In addition, trust was increased by focusing on things that the involved parties could agree upon, as well as by considerate communication with landowners affected by conservation plans. Individual traits and initiatives also played an important role, as well as giving the whole process ample time to mature. In general it can be assumed that many of the trust-promoting interactions identified in this study could be adapted to other situations in order to increase the possibilities of trust.

Sammanfattning

Naturvårdsfrågor är ofta komplexa och svårhanterliga. Olika aktörer och intressen är inblandade och det är allmänt accepterat att konstruktiv interaktion är nödvändig för hanteringen av dessa frågor. Enligt den teori som ligger till grund för denna avhandling, definieras konflikt som interaktion mellan människor under vilken aktörernas tillit till interaktionen minskar. Tecken på konflikt och minskande tillit till interaktionen är att aktörerna försöker förändra situationen och vissa av försöken kan leda till ökad konflikt.

Syftet med avhandlingen är att beskriva den sociala interaktionen som föregår när människor rör sig från konflikt till dialog. I avhandlingen presenteras en fallstudie av hur naturvårdsfrågor hanterades i Östra Vätterbranterna under perioden 1998 till 2004. Under den perioden lyckades de inblandade parterna övergå från konflikt till dialog. Kärnan i konflikten var motsättning mellan skogsproduktion och ideell naturvård, med fokus på bevarandet av nyckelbiotoper. År 1998 startade man 'projekt Östra Vätterbranterna', där fem (senare sju) organistioner, som representerar olika intressenter, sedan har samverkat för att hantera frågan. Studien bygger på intervjuer med representanter för de olika organisationerna.

Resultaten visar många exempel på aktörers försök att förändra situationen. Några av dom är att dra sig ur interaktionen; försök att flytta frågan till en annan arena; försök att ändra eller ifrågasätta andra aktörers trovärdighet, legitimitet eller identitet; försök att öka sin egen trovärdighet och legitimitet; och till och med enstaka fall av våld. De visar också att i slutet på studieperioden karaktäriserades interaktionen mellan samma parter av dialog och tillit. Med utgångspunkt i antagandet att vissa former av interaktion bidrar till att öka tillit, identifieras och beskrivs några exempel på tillitsskapande interaktioner. De är bland annat meta-kommunikation; processledning; att etablera en legitim arena där frågan kan hanteras; och gemensamma ansträngningar att minska missförstånd. Dessutom ökade tilliten genom att man fokuserade på det parterna kunde enas om samt genom genomtänkt kommunikation med de markägare som påverkades av reservatsbildning. Personliga egenskaper och initiativ spelade också en väsentlig roll liksom att hela processen fick ta den tid den behövde för att mogna. Generellt sett kan det antas att vissa av dom tillitsskapande interktionerna som har blivit identifierade i den här studien också skulle kunna anpassas till andra sammanhang för att främja tillit.

Contents

Abbreviations

CAB	County Administrative Board (*Länstyrelsen*)
CFB	County Forestry Board (*Skogsvårdsstyrelsen*)
EU	European Union
FSF	Federation of Swedish Farmers (*LRF, Lantbrukarnas Riksförbund*)
GFG	Gränna Forest Group (*Gränna skogsgrupp*)
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WKH	Woodland key habitat (*Nyckelbiotop*)
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature (*Världsnaturfonden*)
ÖVB	*Östra Vätterbranterna* (Eastern slopes of Lake Vättern)

1. Introduction

Natural resource management and other environmental issues are often complex and difficult to handle. Different stakeholders and interests are involved and there seem to be a general agreement that some degree of collaboration is needed to deal with these issues. When I came back to Sweden in 2009, after many years abroad, I noticed that the word 'dialogue' was very often used, in different situations. To me – and also I guess to those I heard using it, dialogue implies some kind of constructive interaction. However, in many of these cases dialogue did not seem to have the intended effect. As Wilhelmson and Döös (2005, 5) write: 'Dialogue is a positively charged word that has come to be used in all kinds of circumstances, to add lustre to phenomena that are not particularly dialogic'. Whether it is due to the lack of thorough understanding of the meaning of dialogue, or lack of competence in practicing it, or both, I do not know, but it awoke my curiosity. I am of the opinion that it is very important for people involved in environmental issues, whether authorities, private persons or other stakeholders, to interact and communicate in a constructive way. The question is: how is that achieved, especially if a conflict has already arisen?

In my search for a case study that would suit my interest, I came across *Östra Vätterbranterna* (ÖVB), a region and a project with the same name in the County of Jönköping, Sweden. ÖVB, or the eastern slopes of Lake Vättern, are renowned for their scenic beauty, varied landscape, small-scale farming lots and high biodiversity in forests as well as in agricultural land. The intensified focus on nature conservation over the last decades has led to an increased interest in ÖVB. Many conservation efforts have been initiated, not always to the liking of the affected stakeholders. As a result, a conflict arose in the area in the 1990s. To deal with the problem, a project group was formed, including representatives of landowner organisations, authorities and NGOs. Through intensive work over many years the situation has changed for the better and the former disputing stakeholder groups are now collaborating. ÖVB is therefore often mentioned as a success story, but the process has not always been easy.

Peter Jonsson (2003, 23), former ÖVB project administrator, describes how the ÖVB project group evolved

> …a lot from the first suspicious and groping attempts of collaboration around the year 2000 to a well-functioning forum for production and environmental issues in Vätterbranterna in the year 2004.

In this thesis I will look at what happened in the ÖVB case during the conflict phase and later, when the parties involved in the conflict gradually started to work together. The actors themselves say that they went from conflict to dialogue during this period. I will mainly look at the ÖVB project group and will do so by studying how some of the key actors recount what happened in the years 1998-2004. As the study is based on the assumption that conflict and dialogue are different forms of social interaction (see the theoretical framework in the next chapter), the primary focus is on the interactions the stakeholders engaged in during this period.

1.1 Aim
The aim of this thesis is to describe the social interaction that takes place when people move from conflict to dialogue.

The analysis is based on the definition of conflict as '[s]ocial interaction during which the actors trust in the interaction is decreasing' (Hallgren 2003, 8), and the focus is, consequently, on the actors trust in the interaction. For dialogue I do not use one single definition, but build on the general idea that it involves more constructive and desirable ways to interact than conflict does. The central aspects of dialogue are that the participants learn from each other's thoughts and experiences in an open, respectful and constructive conversation (see Daniels &Walker 2001; Wilhelmson & Döös 2005).

1.2 Thesis outline

In the next chapter the theoretical framework for this thesis will be described, followed by some background information about the ÖVB case. In Chapter 3 the methods, as well as the demarcation of the case study, are explained and the interviewees are introduced. The results of the interviews are presented in Chapter 4 and then interpreted and discussed in Chapter 5.

2. Theoretical framework and case background

2.1 Theory

Ramirez (2001, 141) refers to dialogue as 'true conversation'. He states that human beings have the need to communicate simply because they are different from each other. Through speech we make our meanings understood to others with the intention to create understanding and trust. The Greek word *dialogos* is composed of the two words *dia* and *logos*, and literally means 'through speech'. Daniels and Walker (2001, 132) define dialogue as '…a form of open, learning-oriented discussion. Dialogue is…a process in which parties communicate openly, constructively and respectfully'. Wilhelmson and Döös (2005, 6) have a similar understanding. They describe dialogue as an 'ideal for conversation that we can strive towards' and say that 'dialogue means learning from each other's thoughts and experiences about a phenomenon or a subject that everyone, in different ways, are interested in understanding a little bit more and better'. Through dialogue, people construct broader knowledge and understanding together. Hallgren and Ljung (2005) explain that a prerequisite for progress in handling environmental issues is that mutual learning occurs among the actors. In fact, lack of learning is often the cause of the problem or the reason why the situation is not handled constructively. Constructive communication that enhances learning can bring about constructive and innovative actions.

However, to have a dialogue is not always easy and usually needs some training and special competence (Wilhelmson & Döös 2005). The most important factors in dialogic competence are the abilities to talk and listen Dialogue also involves trying to understand the other participants' emotions and viewpoints; attention to the interests of all primary parties and equal opportunities to participate in the discussion. It also requires patience: people need time to think and speak (Daniels & Walker 2001). The participants should have a genuine interest in the other parties' experiences and be equally willing to share their own (Wilhelmson & Döös 2005). They should also perceive each other as equal and be prepared to change their understanding of the topic. In some cases it is beneficial to use a facilitator, who takes care of the process. I will explain the role of facilitation in a little more detail later. The aim with a group dialogue is that the participants become aware of each others perspectives and come to see that their own perspectives and understandings are only one of many ways to understand an issue. This allows the group to create new, integrated knowledge and understanding, which is particularly important in problematic situations such as conflicts.

Conflict is often thought of as a matter of opposing interests. Hallgren and Ljung (2005, 134) explain opposing interests thus: 'Two persons are interested in something and if one of them does what she is interested in doing, it diminishes the possibility for the other to do what she is interested in doing'. Hallgren (2003) argues that opposing interests are only a part of the picture. He takes an example of a situation where two actors make different claims to a certain resource. This situation can have many different outcomes depending on the interaction that takes place between the actors. It might result in conflict or no conflict, escalation or easing of conflict, and still in all outcomes their claims, or interests, stay the same. It is evident then that conflict is not caused by opposing interests only but that social interaction is the central factor. Hallgren means that problems should be managed in different ways depending on if there is conflict involved or only opposing interests. It is therefore important to be able to separate the two situations. He has proposed a definition

of conflict, built on these considerations, which I will come back to later. First I will take a brief look at some other views on conflict.

Daniels and Walker (2001) also focus on social interaction and incompatibilities when explaining conflict. People use cognitive frames to interpret situations, and sometimes their interpretations lead them to perceive incompatibilities in e.g. interests or values. These perceptions might lead to conflict-nurturing behaviour, such as competition about resources. The authors say that a competitive stance leads to inability to communicate. They indicate two main responses to conflict: a spontaneous reaction which often leads to escalated conflict, and a more considered, intentional response which is needed for conflict management. According to them, the aim of conflict intervention should be to manage and improve the situation but not necessarily to solve the conflict. They stress the importance of trust and constructive communication for conflict management to be effective. The objectives of their approach for conflict management, *collaborative learning*, are to manage the cognitive frames of disputing parties and to make progress in all three of what they call the fundamental and interrelated dimensions of conflict, i.e. procedure, substance and relationships. During the first part of a collaborative process, dialogue is used to build a shared understanding of the situation among the participants. Also during the later stages of the process, when it comes to decision making, the discussion should have a dialogic quality to it.

Glasl (1999) describes conflict as an interaction where there is a change in perception of the other party which then leads to sensed incompatibility of e.g. ideas or interests. In this interaction at least one of the parties comes to feel constrained by the other's actions. This causes changes in behaviour, feelings and/or desires which all affect each other in a kind of negative causational circle. The result is a downward spiral of conflict. Glasl believes that the root cause of conflict is difficulty in dealing with change. His approach to conflict management is to help people develop a new attitude. To do so they need to uncover the fear underlying their old, destructive ways, and to learn how to listen and show consideration for the other party, as well as to stand up for their own view.

Bush and Folger (1994) have interaction, interpretation and the communication process as focal points in their view of conflict. They describe how misinterpretations, or misunderstandings, of other people's actions and statements lead to frustration as well as uncertainty about how to deal with a situation. This might lead to conflict. Bush and Folger promote mediation – a third-party intervention – to help conflicting parties re-interpret each others actions and statements. The objective of mediation is empowerment: that the parties involved control the process and outcome themselves and develop capacity to handle disputes. It is also to help actors understand and show understanding of each others needs and perspectives and to come to some kind of agreement.

From the above it is possible to conclude that these authors have a quite similar understanding of conflict, even though their emphases vary. One can say that social interaction, interpretations of other people's actions and intentions, perceived incompatibility of interests, a focus on communication and, to a certain extent, trust are themes that run through all of them. Even though they propose different methods for conflict intervention, they all put an emphasis on the need to first establish constructive communication and trust between the parties before it is even possible to address the subject of the quarrels. Their methods all include some dialogic qualities.

I will now return to Hallgren's definition of conflict and its implications. He defines conflict as: 'Social interaction during which the actors trust in the interaction is decreasing' (Hallgren 2003, 8). According to him, interaction is not only the cause or consequence of conflict – it is the conflict. An example he gives is when in a conversation a sudden misinterpretation of the other's intention or action, or a perceived provocation of some sort, causes the actors mutual trust to decrease. This might provoke them to act in ways that diminish the trust even further. The situation soon feels unpredictable to them and they start to distrust it and their own ability to understand and be understood. They might even start to interpret the other's actions as malicious and to assume that the other's intentions or actions will hinder them to get what they want. Their interaction, then, becomes focused on reducing each other's influence on the situation and preventing each other from acting. The escalation of the conflict is a fact.

According to Ramirez (2001), human acts are based on trust, which is founded in knowledge developed through communication. Trust is also fundamental to communication itself. He describes trust as being characterised by *recognition* and *expectation*. To feel trust in a situation we need to somehow recognise ourselves in it and be able to expect a certain response to our actions. If there is no recognition and expectation, there is no trust in the situation and it becomes difficult to communicate constructively. To go back to the situation described above, this means that the actors have to expect that they have the competence and knowledge needed to act in the situation (Hallgren & Ljung 2005). They also have to recognise at least some part of what is going on and be able to predict how they will be perceived and treated. They need to believe it is possible for them to understand the other and to make themselves understood. Hallgren (2003) means that one has to trust an interaction situation in order to be ready to take part in it. If one does not trust the situation, one tries to do something to change it, and the aim is to decrease the other party's influence or increase one's own.

There are different ways to change a situation, some destructive and other constructive (Hallgren & Ljung 2005). The destructive ones can lead to conflict escalation. One common way is to simply withdraw from the interaction. Another method is to try to gain more influence over the situation by preventing the other from having influence. This can be done in many ways. The interaction can be moved to another arena. Or one actor can make attempts to change or question the other actor's credibility, legitimacy, image or self-perception. The other way round, he can also try to increase his own credibility and legitimacy or try to get support for his standpoint from others. According to Hallgren and Ljung, knowledge is often used in the battle. It can be used to strengthen one's own standpoint or to belittle the opponent. Verbal attacks and physical violence are also attempts to change the situation. In a destructive situation, the actors not only act to reduce the other's influence, they also assess the risk of the other's actions harming them or reducing their influence. Misinterpretations and misunderstandings are not only the cause of trust-diminishing interaction, but also the result when constructive communication is inhibited.

If conflict is caused by distrust in the interactive situation, then it is logical to assume that conflict management and conflict prevention should focus on trust building. As has already been mentioned, many scholars agree on the necessity of first establishing constructive communication and trust between the parties before it is possible to attend to the subject matters of a conflict. A constructive way to try to change a conflict in order to increase trust is to use meta-communication – or communication about communication (Hallgren &

Ljung 2005). It gives the involved parties an opportunity to talk about and reflect on the communicative aspects of the situation, such as doubts and preconditions, and to agree on how to communicate in a way that would increase trust. But to start communicating in a constructive way requires that the individual overcomes some of his distrust and acts as if he trusted the situation. Usually this is not the spontaneous and 'natural' way to react in a conflict. It might also be perceived by others as yet another strategy. To step out of conventional conflict behaviour and suggest something different requires courage and willpower, something that both Hallgren and Ljung (2005) and Daniels and Walker (2003) have illustrated.

In complex situations it is often beneficial to have a third party to facilitate meetings or mediate between the parties. A facilitator is a person who is leading or coordinating a group process (Hunter et al 1995). Facilitation is about the communication process and not about content. It is often recommended that the facilitator should stay as neutral as possible and not have a stake in the issue being discussed (see e.g. Hunter et al 1995; Wilhelmson & Döös 2005). The task of the facilitator is, among other things, to help the group work effectively and creatively, enable full participation and group dynamics, keep participants on track towards their goal, and manage practicalities. In a conflict situation the most necessary task is to create opportunities to increase the actors' trust in the interaction (Hallgren & Ljung 2005). One way to do that is for the group to make joint decisions in issues that are not directly connected to the dispute, such as decisions about meeting procedures. A trust building process should also give the involved parties the opportunity to get to know the other's perspectives, to show that they have a true desire to do something about the situation as well as to show that they are willing to interact in a respectful way.

Social interaction is a recurring concept in this discussion and might need some explanation. Charon (2010, 149) defines social interaction as '…mutual social action that involves symbolic communication and interpretations of each other's acts.' According to theories of symbolic interactionism, of which Charon is a spokes-person, humans are essentially social – it is a matter of survival – and social interaction is central to being human. Social interaction is an important cause of our actions: how we choose to act in a situation is based on our interpretation of other people's acts and vice versa. Taking the perspective of others and aligning our actions to theirs is social interaction. Perspectives are created through social interaction and so are other human features such as identity.

'Identity is the name we call ourselves. It is socially recognized and validated. It is usually the name we announce to others that tells them who we are as we are acting' (Charon 2010, 84). We do not have one single identity, but many. They are situation-dependent and continuously evolving through our interactions. We act based on our identity in a situation and others respond on basis of their interpretation of our identity and who they want to present themselves as in the moment. This means that identities are sensitive to others' responses. Charon explains that we become emotionally attached to some of our identities, and if someone does or says something that we perceive as an attack to our precious identity we become angry and defensive. This can be a source of escalating conflict, as mentioned above.

In this overview, dialogue has come across as something positive and desirable while conflict has been mostly portrayed as something to avoid. However, this does not mean that conflicts are entirely bad. Senecah (2004) points out that sometimes conflict is

necessary to raise awareness, challenge old assumptions and bring about social change. At times people have no other choice than to protest and create conflict, e.g. when authorities make decisions that have very negative impacts on people's lives without involving them in the decision-making process. Indeed, many environmental disasters have been prevented or resolved because people have protested and started a conflict (see e.g. Cox 2010). Usually people do not start a conflict about something that does not matter much to them. This means that the parties in a conflict are really engaged in the issue – they care about the outcome.

2.2 Background to the ÖVB case

Conservation of biodiversity is one aspect of the Swedish national goals of environmentally adapted forestry. In the Forestry Act of 1993, nature conservation and production are regarded as equally important while before that, production was the main concern (Skogsstyrelsen 2007). The concept of *woodland key habitat* is widely used to identify areas with high conservation values. A woodland key habitat (WKH) is defined as '…an area where one or more red-listed [threatened] species occur…or where the nature of the forest indicates a strong likelihood of finding red-listed species' (Skogsstyrelsen 2002). WKHs are often found in dead wood and old forest stands. They are rich in biodiversity compared to their often small areas – sometimes containing only one single tree. During the period 1995–1998, the County Forestry Board (CFB, now Swedish Forest Agency) conducted inventories of WKHs in privately owned forests in the ÖVB area, on commission from the Swedish Government (Jonsson 2004). At the same time, Gränna Forest Group (GFG), a local NGO with special interests in biodiversity conservation, made their own inventories. Among the members of the group were some very knowledgeable biologists. They found that the CFB had only captured about one third of the existing key habitats in their inventory and pointed their findings out to the authorities and affected landowners.

In the ÖVB area most of the 43 000 ha land is privately owned, with more than 1000 landowners for about 670 farming units (Jonsson 2004). Most of the farms are small, with an average of 23 ha of productive forest per unit. Logging and thinning is carried out mostly by *Södra skogsägarna* (hereafter referred to as Södra), a local economic association of forest owners. In 2004, Södra had 427 members in the ÖVB area, including the owners of 88% of the productive forests. Frequent existence of WKHs complicated Södra's work as they were under obligation not to cut key habitats due to certification standards. Uncertified wood had also become difficult to sell, or fetched lower prices. This meant changes in forestry and farming practices which upset the affected landowners. They were also annoyed when they learned that persons, who carried out inventories, had been 'sneaking around' on their properties without their knowing. This gave rise to the conflict between the parties involved.

3. Methods and presentation of interviewees

In April 2010 I stayed for one week in the city of Jönköping, the administrative centre of the County of Jönköping, where the ÖVB area is located. During my stay I interviewed four persons who all were involved in the ÖVB issue during the whole study period (1998–2004). After returning to Uppsala I made a telephone interview with a fifth person. The interviews were semi-structured and conducted in Swedish. I asked the interviewees to tell me about the situation at the beginning and the end of the period, and about what happened in between. They were also asked to describe how they experienced the situations, other actors and the relations between different stakeholders and stakeholder groups. I did not use a pre-formulated questionnaire, only a brief outline of the topics.

The face-to-face interviews were recorded and later transcribed. During the telephone interview I only took notes. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours. Due to bad sound quality of the recordings, some parts of them – usually one or just a few words – were impossible to hear. The citations from interviews used in the text are translated by me.

As a memory support and discussion tool for the interviews I prepared a drawing with important events marked on a timeline, based on information presented in Peter Jonsson's report from 2004. I also made drawings during the face-to-face interviews that resembled a mixture between a mind-map (Buzan & Buzan 2006) and a 'rich picture' (Checkland 1981). These drawings served as notes as well as visual aids during the interviews. The interviewees were told in the beginning of the interview that I would use this tool and they were invited to take part themselves if they wanted. Only one interviewee joined in, and only at one point.

During my stay in Jönköping I also had a couple of conversations with Simon Jonegård, my initial contact person at the Swedish Forestry Agency. He got involved in the ÖVB project group after 2004 and is now in charge of ÖVB's application to UNESCO to become a biosphere reserve. Our talks were something in-between interviews and reflection sessions. In addition I attended a meeting of the present ÖVB executive board, where two of five members have been involved from the start, as well as a meeting of ÖVB Forum, a reference group of interested residents, held in a local community. Last but not least, I had the opportunity to experience the landscape and nature of the area. While not a direct part of my investigation, which is concerned with a time period in the past, all of this yielded valuable information and insights.

When it was decided, in collaboration with Simon Jonegård, that I would look at some part of the ÖVB project for this thesis, the first idea was to use a small and quite recent conservation case in the area, which is regarded as very successful. However, after some preliminary research on that case I felt that it was a bit trivial in a communication/interaction context. All interactions seemed to have been constructive and there was not much probability for it to have been otherwise. It made me think that ten years earlier such smooth communication around a conservation issue involving landowners and NGOs might not have been the natural thing to expect. I thought it likely that the prerequisites for constructive communication around conservation issues in the ÖVB area had been created in an earlier stage of the project. What I was looking for was a case where it had not been obvious from the start that everything would work out fine.

Consequently, I thought it would be more interesting to study that earlier period, which is what I also did.

3.1 The interviewees

For interviewees I have chosen one representative for each of the stakeholder groups that were most important during the study period. The criteria were that they had been actively involved during the whole period, first to some extent in the conflict and later as members of the ÖVB project group. However, in this study they only represent their own experience of being representatives for their group or organisation in the interaction with other stakeholders. They are presented here, in alphabetical order, and according to their positions during the study period:

Ryno Andersson (R.A.): Landowner, farmer and representative for The Federation of Swedish Farmers (FSF) in the ÖVB project group. FSF is representing local forestry and agricultural interests in the area.

Claes Hellsten (C.H.): Biologist, landowner, representing Gränna Forest Group (GFG), an independent local branch of the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, in the ÖVB project group. In 2004 GFG had about 25 members, where of some were landowners.

Göran Karlsson (G.K.): Landowner, farmer and representative for FSF in the ÖVB project group.

Torbjörn Swerre (T.S.): Representing the County Forestry Board (CFB, since 2006 the Swedish Forest Agency) in the ÖVB project group. In charge of all environmental and nature protection issues of the CFB, including inventories of woodland key habitats.

Johan Uhr (J.U.): Representing the County Administrative Board (CAB) in the ÖVB project group. In charge of nature conservation. The CAB is a coordinating governmental authority, among other tings responsible for the distribution of environmental subsidies form the European Union (EU), as well as nature conservation, which includes establishing and administering nature reserves and other protected areas.

The intention was to interview one representative for Södra skogsägarna (Södra) as well but my requests for an interview were not successful. The Municipality of Jönköping has been involved in the ÖVB project, but during the study period mainly as a landowner, which led to my decision not to interview them. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) was also represented in the project group, but as they were not involved from the start, I decided to omit them too.

This is a study about what happened during a period in the past and the material builds on the interviewees memory of what happened. I am aware that this is problematic for many reasons. Still, I think the interviews give valid information about the interviewees' personal experiences, which is enough for the purpose of this thesis. The results also build on few interviews, which implies that there are many other perspectives on what happened during this time period that are not represented. This thesis therefore only claims to represent the experience of the interviewees, and moreover only my interpretation of their experience.

4. Results

In this chapter I will present the results of my research. I will do so by first giving an overview over what happened in ÖVB during the study period (approximately 1998–2004), when the situation went from conflict to dialogue. The account is built on the interviews and is by no means complete or objective – it might not even be accurate from the perspective of those involved. I will mention some aspects from the interviews that I have understood to be important in this context and will do so, as far as possible, in chronological order. In the second part of the chapter, some themes will be presented that caught my attention during the interpretation of the interviews. In this chapter and the next, direct citations from the interviews will be used in two ways. Some citations are longer, kept separately and it is possible to see who said what. Others are short and fitted into my own sentences. They can not be traced to a certain person. All direct interview citations are in italics, to differentiate them from direct citations taken from literature.

4.1 From conflict to dialogue

4.1.1 The conflict situation

When talking about conflict, people often tend to refer to the struggle over seemingly competing interests. As this thesis argues, that is only part of the story, but still an important part of it. On the surface, then, the story of ÖVB starts with the opposing interests of nature conservation and production and the scene is mainly the forests in the area. As mentioned in the introduction chapter, the proponents for biodiversity conservation were a small but very active local NGO, Gränna Forest Group (GFG), but also the Swedish government, influenced by international environmental trends. In ÖVB, the national environmental interests were represented by the County Forestry Board (CFB) and the County Administrative Board (CAB). The production interests were held forth by the landowners – the owners of the forests in question – and their interest organisations; The Federation of Swedish Farmers (FSF) and Södra skogsägarna (Södra). To a certain extent the CFB was also production-oriented.

In the introduction I mentioned that the CFB had carried out WKH inventories in the area during some years in the 1990s. They were satisfied with their own results, but GFG was of another opinion. GSG's impression was that the person at CFB responsible for most of the inventories chose to identify *just enough* WKHs and the reason was that he *closed his eyes to nature values because he thought it might have too many negative consequences for the landowners if he found too much*. On the whole, GFG found the authorities (CFB, CAB and Jönköping municipality) to be *uninterested and unknowledgeable* in these matters. GFG tried to show the additional WKHs they had found to the CFB. They contributed information and maps, but GFG's findings were not registered by the CFB.

For each area he intends to log, the landowner has to notify the CFB. GFG kept track of these notifications and in cases where the forest had unregistered WKHs they tried to stop the logging by various means. Their first step usually was to talk directly to the landowners to *try to attain a voluntary agreement*. The inventory activities and the actions of GFG gave rise to worry and annoyance among farmers, especially those with smaller forests, because they would be comparatively more affected by conservation. The farmers felt that the nature conservationists interfered with everything they did:

> *[E]verything, everything, everything should be left untouched and if it came to logging there were a lot of restrictions. … In principle, GFG was subscribing to all loggings. … Conservation was important but there was no understanding of production; that you also have to make a living. … It was rather gruffish (G.K.).*

GFG in general, or only certain members of the group, were described as *militant, pushy, having difficulty in handling other people, only seeing their part of the world and not understanding others* but also as *engaged*, *active, wanting results* and *very competent biologists.* During this time, some members of the group got personal belongings such as post boxes and car tires destroyed by unknown persons. There are even examples where they received threatening letters. My interviewee from GFG thought that the landowners probably saw them as *bold troublemakers and saboteurs.* He also pointed out that, contrary to what many others might believe, the GFG actually had a good relationship with a majority of the farmers in the area during this time.

That other people, especially the members of GFG, had opinions about how they managed their forests, made the landowners angry. It was *their land and they can do what they want. No moss-nerd shall tell them how to manage their own forest.* The GFG, as well as conservationists in general, were not seen as legitimate stakeholders: *To our eyes they were not accepted.* For the individual landowner *the forest is of great emotional value.* It might have been in the family for generations. Then there was also the economic aspect. The presence of a valuable WKH meant that a landowner could not cut and manage the forest the way he used to. This could have negative consequences for his economy, e.g. in day-to-day life and in the case of a generation shift. The tradition was to save some part of the forest as a capital reserve for generation shifts or similar occasions. This new situation caused a lot of trouble and worry for some of the landowners.

Another aspect of conservation was that GFG required the landowners to leave windthrows or leftover debris from logging in the forests. Dead wood is choice habitat for many species, as the slogan of GFG indicates: 'Dead wood is alive'. This idea did not appeal to the farmers:

> *If I have windthrows in my forest, then I come across as a bad farmer…You don't want that stamp on you. ...helter-skelter in the forest…overgrown land…It means bad economy to us, but then, also, one is seen as a bad farmer (R.A.)*

The GFG was also accused of *playing authorities* in matters that they had they had no legitimate right to meddle with. Their activities seem, in some cases, to have been confused with those of the authorities, i.e. the CFB and the CAB. This was in part due to the authorities having occasionally employed at least one member of GFG to do inventories in the past. It was of course not easy for the landowners to know whose tasks the inventors were performing at any given time. The CFB had informed the farmers beforehand about the inventories, e.g. through advertisements, but the individual farmer had no possibility to know exactly when it would take place on his property and his presence was not required. There were also some rumours that the CFB was running GFG's errands, which was not the case, rather the contrary. Nevertheless, the landowners felt themselves to be *controlled and suspected…it is not possible to do everything right.* They themselves also felt distrust towards the authorities who were seen to be *interfering with their management of the land.* The suspicion was mainly towards the CAB. They could decide to withdraw EU subsidies or make the landowner re-pay if things were not satisfactory, and they also administered nature conservation:

> *[T]he CAB has had much tougher cases, more restrictions have been involved. To come forth and say: 'We want to make a nature reserve'…they are an authority; they only have authority tasks (T.S.)*

> *[Talking from the perspective of the landowners:]'Here you come, the government and GFG together to take our land'…it was not that they were <u>afraid</u> that it would happen, it <u>was</u> 'the truth'…'That is the truth, the government comes and takes the land. In some ways it is like that too (J.U.).*

What Johan Uhr refers to in the last sentence is that the threat was real in some sense; at this time some reserves had already been established in the area in order to protect biodiversity. However, the fear of the inventories leading to loss of land to nature reserves was to some extent built on a misunderstanding. The objective of the WKH inventories was to map what was there to build a knowledge base for further decisions and extension service. Even though nature reserves were created around some of the WKHs, it was not true that every single WKH would be turned into a reserve, as some landowners seemed to believe. This misunderstanding caused a lot of confusion and anger. To this might be added that even though the landowners were wary of the CAB they also had to respect them and their decisions. *We were the authorities and they could not question us, of course*. The CFB, on the other hand, were not perceived as 'authorities' in the same way. They offered extension and other services and from the interviews one gets the impression that landowners had a more positive relation to them. Still, they were not totally trusted in this case.

During this period there was not much cooperation between the CFB and the CAB and there was even some rivalry about responsibilities, mainly higher up in the organisations:

> *The CAB had the responsibility to protect larger areas while the CFB had the responsibility to map, but they did not communicate. There was somehow no strategy for how to handle large WKHs…or prioritizing or anything. They just carried on with their own tasks (C.H.).*

> *The frightening thing was that we discovered that the CFB and the CAB had nothing in common, that the authorities didn't have anything to do with each other, no dialogue (R.A.).*

It has already been mentioned that the GFG was a group of very engaged and knowledgeable people. They were perhaps somewhat ahead of their time, and part of the problem in this case was that their ideas often did not meet any understanding from landowners and authorities. Many farmers did not understand or acknowledge the values in biodiversity and the need for conservation. The CFB and the CAB most likely recognized GFG's knowledge, and to a certain extent their ideas, but they themselves did not have enough biology competence to fully understand the information or the consequences of the information that GFG fed them. This led the GFG members to feel *frustration and anger when you can not get the counterpart to understand what you are talking about.*

GFG had some kind of an action plan when they wanted a WKH protected. Their first move, as mentioned above, was to talk directly to the landowners. Sometimes the landowner showed interest and the matter was settled. If they did not get an assent from the landowner, the next move was to try to get the CFG to officially recognize the WKH in question, which would protect it from cutting to a certain extent. If this did not succeed, the third step was to try to talk the CAB into making a nature reserve. There was also the possibility to postpone logging by asking for an interim reserve. This was largely about

saving the last remains. The group's intentional communication strategy in all matters was to *keep to subject matters and not to attack on a personal level.*

GFG's actions were met with counter-actions. Some landowners *were very offensive and handed in logging notification and did not want to talk to us.* The authorities tended to ignore the GFG's requests and information and occasionally even lied to them about what was actually happening. If the case was really important to GFG, the group members were very inventive in finding channels to get their message through in order to get the outcome they wanted. They used their large contact net, which included people in media, politics and well-known experts in biology. The experts were called upon to confirm the findings of GFG and their importance. Media campaigns were launched, and other means, e.g. t-shirts with GFG's slogan printed on them, excursions, brochures and exhibitions were used to call attention to what was going on. When the local authorities refused to listen, they went higher up in the organisations with their demands:

> B.B.: *How do you decide if you are going to take 'the fight' or not?*
>
> C.H.: *(Thinking) Well, it probably is when we don't have any other possibilities to reach…It is when it has come to a complete stop and the cases have been really important…Because we are nothing if we are not visible in the media. We are 20 nerds, or were at that time. There was no reason to listen to us. We were no party, we were nobody…We would not have existed had we not fought so much.*

Landowners and local authorities were not happy with the media attention and other effects of GFG's campaigns:

> [About GFG mobilizing media and higher authorities] *Well, you get irritated and mad at the same time, also when they ran our errands…went to Södra for example…Because it was very much at the bottom then, towards GFG, nature conservation (R.A.).*

4.1.2 The ÖVB Project

Ryno Andersson was a representative in the FSF county board at this time (around 1998). FSF heard many complaints from farmers about the authorities and GFG *running around on their properties* and *telling them that there will be nature reserves.* Ryno felt that something had to be done – the involved parties needed to talk – so he called Johan Uhr at the CAB, whom he had met on a few occasions in the past.

> *…so Ryno told me that they mixed this up [the farmers confused GFG's action with the CAB's and their responsibilities] and then I felt immediately that this is absolutely not acceptable. I was in charge of nature conservation then and we had to do something about it (J.U.).*

This telephone call resulted in a meeting, held in Gränna, with landowners and representatives from FSF, CAB, CFB, GFG and Södra. The meeting is described as *messy* and *not very successful.* According to Jonsson (2004), a couple of meetings of this kind were held and mainly devoted to the CAB and CFB giving information. He writes that the meetings were counterproductive and difficult to handle. 'Only the most loud-mouthed landowners could make themselves and their opinions heard' (Jonsson, 2004, 13).

Nevertheless, some time after the first meeting, a project group chaired by Johan Uhr and the CAB was established with two representatives for each of the FSF, CAB, CFB, GFG and Södra. Quite soon, one representative from WWF and another from the municipality of Jönköping joined the group. The first meetings were characterised by much tension, as the

parties continued to argue about production and conservation. There was not much understanding of the other party's perspectives. Even the CAB and CFB had some quarrels between them. GFG was accused of trying to control the meetings and they continued their own advocacy campaign outside of the group. The FSF representatives felt that they had backing from their organisation, and Södra was also a great support to them, but they got a lot of heavy criticism from fellow landowners. How could they *sit down and discuss with GFG and the authorities*?

Gradually, *after 10–15 meetings or so*, the group members *started to become friends* and were able to work together in a more constructive way. This did not mean that they had the same opinion, but they say that they gained an understanding of each others' points of view and slowly came to share and respect the skills and knowledge of each other:

> *Yes, but I said every time that we have to think about biodiversity and the landowners said every time that we have to think about production and…income. In the end you have heard all this to exhaustion and you don't have to say it any more. They know my standpoint and I know theirs (C.H.).*

> *If you continue to discuss, then ultimately you learn from each other. In the end you gain an understanding of the other's point of view. You can, for example, see the nature values in a rotten tree stump and the others recognise that farming and animals and economic benefit is needed to keep the landscape open (G.K.).*

The feeling that *if we quit the project group, then the other side will take over* was also of some importance in keeping the group together.

One specific project group meeting is mentioned in most of the interviews. The interviewees talk about *a turning point* and *the ice break*. The meeting seems to have started with FSF and Södra being particularly angry with one of GFG's private initiatives and GFG's continued membership of the project group was questioned. FSF and Södra were ready to leave the group if GFG stayed on:

> *So we said that if we are a problem for the project group, then we will leave. Then you will have to continue without GFG. We will carry on our work…Then they said that if you want to be a part of this, don't rock the boat and don't take your own initiatives all the time (C.H.).*

> *Then we had a discussion. Well, there was a lot of quarrel, but it ended with people saying that, well, they'd better stay. They can solve the problems. And I think that was fundamental for everything…Then we had decided that everyone should stay and that we should work together on a solution….Everyone should stay and everyone should stand for it…we had some very tense meetings after that but no one ever questioned if we should continue. It was decided, said is said…somehow it was also a bit in the air that you should be able to trust each other (J.U.).*

So it was decided that the project group should continue unchanged.

According to Jonsson (2004), the objectives of 'Project Östra Vätterbranterna' were to protect and develop biodiversity in the ÖVB area, and moreover, to work with nature conservation from a holistic perspective in relation to landscape (agricultural and forest) as well as economic interests and environmental concerns. Much of *the conflict was due to a disagreement about how reality looked – what nature values were actually there*. One very significant result of the work of the project group was the decision to carry out new, more detailed WKH inventories in the area. A large part of the biological values in ÖVB are found in meadows and pastures and in the border zones between forests and agricultural

land. These areas were not covered by the CFB's original inventory as they were the 'responsibility' of the CAB. The CAB had made an inventory in 1990 (Jonsson 2004) but they now made a new and more complete one. The CFB made the re-inventory of forest areas in 2001. There were heated discussions in the project group about whether it would be appropriate to employ one of the GFG members to do part of the job. He was one of the country's most competent persons in this field, but also the most controversial from FSF's and Södra's point of view, as the landowners associated his name with the first inventories and their bad experience with them. However, in the end he was employed:

> *That was the only time, I think, that the former county forester stood on our side. He said that 'we shall not find just enough; we need a complete mapping, otherwise we will always have these fights. We will bring in the best competence' (C.H.).*

In connection with the new inventories, care was taken to inform the landowners in a considerate way, and have a better contact with them than the previous time.

To have the results of the new inventories is mentioned as another turning point for the project group:

> *Because then we went from conflict to dialogue. Then we had data. We had something to talk about that we agreed upon. 'This is what it looks like, what shall we do with it?' And of course, we did not agree on how to handle it, but we agreed on that this was what it looked like (C.H.).*

One of the outcomes of the mapping of existing WKHs was that the CAB insisted on making a 'nature reserve package', where it should be decided once and for all exactly how many nature reserves would be established in a foreseeable future, and where they would be. The idea with the 'package' was, among other things, to reduce the uncertainty and anxiety among landowners about these matters.

> *[A] huge ghost was 'So how many reserves are you going to create?' We can't go out and say that there will maybe be a reserve there and there some time in the future, that would create a lot of anxiety and maybe even actions…I said that we have to bring out the trolls and show them…The ghost can be real, but it is a ghost in the sense that is not as dangerous as you think. And, above all, it is not as much as you think (J.U.).*

The project group did not totally agree on doing it this way, neither on what areas were most valuable and important to protect. There was also a lot of discussion in the group about how to communicate the decisions to the affected landowners. To consult others on these matters was a new approach for the authorities. *As an authority you normally don't do that.* FSF, Södra and GFG were against sending the information in *brown envelopes*:

> *A farmer easily becomes agitated and upset when he gets an envelope…He doesn't read the whole letter but becomes agitated…and upset, especially in the beginning, and then you get a negative attitude towards the letter and then you read it in a another way…it is this bureaucracy, authorities (R.A.).*

Nevertheless, it was decided to create a fixed number of new reserves. Some 80 farmers got letters where it was stated what reserves would be created, that it would take some years to establish them all and that no further reserves would be created on the authorities' initiatives. However, the farmers themselves were welcome to take the initiative if they wanted to protect other areas. In connection with the letters, information meetings were held in different communities in the area. The authorities readied themselves for a lot of complaints, but they got fewer than they expected. Throughout the years, some larger meetings have been held with landowners on different occasions, but there are different opinions about this kind of meetings. One interviewee says that *they are a necessary evil,*

you probably have to have them but they are very difficult to handle. Another interviewee states that *information meetings are extremely important. Local ones, so you don't have to drive too far…that they feel that someone cares about them.* He points out though that they should not be too large.

Many landowners in the area have come to accept nature conservation and even to take pride in the nature values on their properties. Part of the acceptance is probably due to the economic compensation they get for conservation. *I have gotten something extra because I have done things in a special way.* A lot of the most valuable WKHs are also found on land that is very steep or in other ways difficult to access or use efficiently, so conservation is often the best option. The ÖVB project has launched some subprojects that give farmers options to conserve biodiversity and still keep a good economy. On example is that the old, but almost abandoned, practice in the area of pollarding trees has been revived and farmers can now get advice and economic compensation if they want to carry out pollarding. There has been a general satisfaction with these arrangements. That said it is right to point out that there is a varying degree of acceptance of conservation among the landowners in the area and even a varying degree of knowledge about the ÖVB project. One of the interviewees thinks that while there is a strong anchoring of the ÖVB project in the project group itself, as well as in a reference group of landowners that was established in the beginning, and also among many others living in the ÖVB area, there are still people who do not accept the conservation idea. He also suspects that many people do not even know about the project.

4.2 Themes

4.2.1 Roles and identities
Some of the statements earlier in this chapter seem to indicate that identities and roles played some part in what happened. Here I will elaborate more on this thought. The farmers felt that they would come across as *bad farmers* if they managed their forests in the way required by nature protection. It is also very much connected to a farmer's identity to make his own decisions concerning his property, and not simply to do what someone else tells him to do, especially not someone who has no legal authority. Another possible example is that it was not perceived as compatible with the farmer identity to collaborate with authorities and *militant* conservationists in the project group. GFG members were accused of *playing authorities* and trying to influence matters, while the other parties, especially landowners but also the legal authorities, held forth that they had no legitimate right to interfere. GFG's identity and role was not as established as the other parties so they had to fight for recognition.

When Johan Uhr recalled that he *felt immediately that this is absolutely not acceptable* when he was told that the landowners confused GFG's actions and intentions with those of the CAB, the reaction appears at first sight to be caused by concern for the landowners. It probably was, but it might also be interpreted in part as a reaction to how this confusion affected the CAB's identity. It is often mentioned in the interviews that Johan was very concerned with the different parties sticking to their roles. He himself describes the CAB's role as *representing all interests* and often emphasizes the board's role as an authority. He also leaned on his professional role when the going got tough in the project group:

> *Usually I am not that courageous, but I didn't have anything personal. I had a professional role to fall back on. So my role was quite [word missing due to bad sound*

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quality of recording] so far as I could stand there and try to mediate and fix and whatever one did (J.U.).

At one point during the controversies over the WKH inventories, one GFG member got the task of making a control inventory of two smaller areas; one of them in the ÖVB area. The results caused some anger when presented at a press conference:

…and we claimed that they had missed 60% and X.X. [person at the CFB] was completely furious, he was so mad, and even those from the National Board of Forestry centrally. They felt that we 'threw shit' on the Forestry Board and they had mapped everything and only missed single spots. To say that they had missed half of them, that was insulting (C.H.).

The anger might well be seen as a reaction to a perceived questioning of the identity of the CFB staff as competent authorities or experts in their field.

One can say that the work of the project group affected these identities. When the group members came to see the other's perspectives they also started to change perspective on themselves and their roles and identities. This change has not been restricted to the project group but has diffused to others living in the area. Many landowners began to take pride in the former unacknowledged nature values on their properties. It became possible to have windthrows in the forest and still be regarded as a good farmer. The members of GFG came to appreciate the need to attend to the economic aspect of farming. It has also become more accepted for authorities, landowners and NGOs to work together. The FSF representatives stopped hearing criticism from their fellow landowners, and the authorities are met with less suspicion today. The contact between the authorities is also much better. There is also evidence that the authorities have loosened up their perception of what is compatible with their roles and identities:

I did realise that I had to talk outside of the track, that I had to go outside of the frames of nature conservation to move forward because the situation had become the way it had… Then I mean that I have to talk forest production, I have to talk generation shift, I have to talk compensation, I have to talk about that the government comes and confiscates and I have to participate in all this talk to be able to establish some kind of mutual understanding. You have to show the others that you understand their problem (J.U.).

Through the years, the project group has developed a shared identity which is evident in the way they talk about the group, each other and their achievements. By defining the ÖVB area and giving it a name, the whole area is now developing an identity that was not there before. The ÖVB identity is very much connected to nature values and agricultural values that the work of the project group has made visible. ÖVB is now being promoted as a brand, which gives further evidence of this identity.

4.2.2 Knowledge
Differences in knowledge and educational background are quite often mentioned in the interviews. The prominent members of GFG had academic backgrounds. They had been interested in nature and biology from young age and had gained a lot of practical experience, first through 'Fältbiologerna', an organisation for young people with these interests, and later through work experience and private interest. The staff of the CAB and the CFB also had higher education, but at the time of the conflict there was a lack of specialised competence in biology, pointed out by the GFG. Most of the older farmers 'only' had education from primary school and agricultural college, which is mainly practical and *there is no biology*. This seems to have caused some wariness and maybe even feelings of inferiority towards those with a higher education. On the other hand the

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farmers had very diverse practical skills, *healthy common sense* and a thorough knowledge about their own land:

> They have lived on their farms for generations and know every boulder and then some outsider comes along and tells them something that they don't know about their farm. That is probably very difficult... (C.H.)

However, due to mechanisation and the fact that Södra, or other outside parties, carried out much of the logging and other work in the forests, some of the knowledge of nature that previous generations held had been lost to many of the contemporary farmers:

> [During the later inventories:] *…we had a biologist then who carried out the inventory of the premises together with the landowner …[the landowner] went with him, yes, and discovered these nature values in the grounds that I have not seen before…a lot of flowers that we had not discovered. I feel a bit embarrassed…my old father…he sat by the road and had his coffee and smelled the flowers. I know how much he enjoyed it. I grew up with the tractor and you just take your coffee in the tractor. You don't see it the same way (R.A.).*

These differences created barriers and a lack of understanding between the stakeholders. Through the interaction in the project group, the members have learned from each other and come to appreciate each others knowledge. The interviewees frequently talk about their appreciation for each other's knowledge and skills and about what they themselves have learned during the process. Many of the joint activities, as well as the activities of GFG, have been connected to spreading knowledge about biodiversity and nature values, and how to manage these values, to the inhabitants in the area.

4.2.3 Information and misunderstandings

Misunderstandings, or misinterpretations, and the way information was handled, are also reoccurring themes in the interviews. Much of the anger and frustration of the conflict period was connected to misunderstandings about the objective of the inventories and what would happen if a WKH was found in one's forest, i.e. 'the ghosts', or 'trolls', mentioned above. There was also some confusion about authorities, persons and mandates. To illustrate this, one example can be given, where the signature (on the completed map) of the person doing the inventories on a certain property was interpreted as meaning that this person had decided that there would be a nature reserve.

The decision to make the second set of more detailed inventories, and thus create a joint understanding of what nature values actually existed, was a turning point for the situation as mentioned earlier. The creation of the 'reserve package' was another one. The 'trolls' were brought out in the open, which reduced the misunderstandings. In the project group there was also recognition of the importance of how difficult information was conveyed to the affected farmers. The practice of sending impersonal 'brown envelopes' was contested. Even though the final information about the intended reserves actually was sent in a letter, much care was taken as to how it was delivered, and arrangements were made to follow up on the letters by answering questions and providing additional information. Much emphasis was put on having more face-to-face contact with the landowners:

> To listen is very important, so he can ease his mind, from his worries, and you can get an understanding of what he is doing. And then you try to explain this in a sensible manner 'So this is how we think and this is how it will affect you and these possibilities exist to get compensation'…I think this is very important, instead of letting him contact the [authority] person himself…That is were the difficulty lies, the way I understand it, and then you get annoyed. You call the operator and 'he is out for lunch' or 'he is on a

business trip' or 'he will be in then and then'. This easily creates resistance from the start and you can try to avoid and build that resistance. Increase participation (R.A.).

4.2.4 The project group

By the year 2004 the interaction in the project group was working quite well. The involved parties use to say that they went from conflict to dialogue during the study period, or *from confrontation to respect and collaboration*. Apart from the aspects touched upon in the other parts of this chapter, some details were mentioned in the interviews about the group process that I would like to describe here.

The group processes, as well as personal traits of some of the group members are often mentioned as important factors. One way to make progress in the project group was *starting with the things you agree on…then you try to find other things you agree on*. Another influential aspect was the ability of the group members to *separate issue and person*.

Johan Uhr took upon himself to chair the project group meetings, mainly because *the CAB's role is to represent all interests*. His contribution is mentioned by the others as important. They say things like: '*you could trust Johan in things*', that there was '*something stable about him*', he was '*flexible*' etc.:

> *He always managed to reconcile us, but sometimes it was very hard…So it was a tough task he had and did well, Johan, by keeping the group together (T.S.).*

Through his previous work, Johan had gained a lot of experience in dealing with this kind of conflicts. He explained to me that he has a personal interest in the part of these issues that *has to do with people* and he has also taken courses in leadership were group dynamics were among the topics. He also mentions the importance of not taking the conflict personally:

> *But I felt that this issue could become something, and I was never afraid of the conflict as such because it was not personal for me… if you are going to survive in this [professional] world, you cannot take it personally (J.U.).*

Ryno Andersson is also identified as a core person in the group development. He states that he likes working with people and during the interview he often talked about how important it is to sit down and talk together – to have a dialogue – and about the need he felt to find solutions. He had previous experience with collaboration and dealing with psycho-social matters in rural development issues, which helped him in this situation. When asked what he thought when his fellow FSF members criticised him for working with GFG and the authorities he said: '*Well, I thought that somehow we have to find the solution to this and move on…*'

The other interviewees recall that Johan Uhr often told the other group members how important it was to keep the group together and try not to change members unnecessarily:

> *It felt very important…to keep the group together, not to change persons too much…if you change persons, then you have to start a little from the beginning…you get to know each other, you simply start to trust each other and that is maybe the most important, that we have to know each other enough to trust each other even though we think differently, and we still do… There is no use to be in a group like this if we think the same. The different interest areas, the different roles we have, we have to take care of them… (J.U.).*

Along the way there were some changes, but some of the original members have been active in the ÖVB group to this day. From at least two of the interviewees I got the impression that this mixture of continuity and the occasional infusion of new ideas and new ways to interact that came with new members has actually been beneficial to the group process.

All group members represented larger organisations or stakeholder groups and they were under pressure from their own organisations as well as national interests to come to conclusions and show some results: *There was pressure from nature protection, pressure from everyone*. It was important that they were trusted by their own people. They also had to show some personal courage, like in the case of the FSF representatives, to join forces with 'the enemy'. The fact that the FSF representatives had a long experience in working for the organisation and were generally trusted by their fellow members made this possible, according to one of my interviewees. Backing from their families was also invaluable when the going got tough.

Last, but not least I will mention the importance of taking the time needed for the process:

> *[S]omething that mattered very much is that we took ourselves an immense amount of time…a lot of resources. Which was criticised (J.U).*

> *One would never have expected that it would be such a long process. A project, I thought maybe one or two years in this, but actually it has become 'hotter and hotter' for every year… I think it is most important to give it time to mature. It is of course a maturing process and, well, maybe it has been a little slow sometimes, but otherwise, a lot of things need to take their time. One can say that we have been alive all the time, with different subprojects (R.A.).*

5. Discussion

The aim of this thesis is to describe the social interaction that takes place when people move from conflict to dialogue. To make sure that I am describing interaction in the right kind of situation, I will start this discussion by verifying that what happened in the ÖVB case actually was 'conflict' and 'dialogue'. I will then look into the interaction taking place in the period between these two stages and what the implications are. The findings will be compared with the theory about conflict and dialogue presented in chapter 2.

First the existence of conflict will be verified. In the ÖVB case it is possible to distinguish two main interests: (1) nature conservation to protect biodiversity and (2) forestry production connected to the livelihood of landowners. At the beginning of the study period, many actors perceived that these interests were mutually exclusive. However, as some of the results of the ÖVB project show, in many cases it was actually possible to combine these interests. The fact that the project group could work together, in spite of different interests and opinions, also shows that opposing interests can not be the only reason for a situation characterised as conflict. This is in line with the theories of conflict mentioned in the introduction (Bush & Folger 1994; Glasl 1999; Daniels & Walker 2001; Hallgren 2003).

To prove that this was indeed a conflict situation, the analysis will be based on Hallgren's (2003, 8) theory, or definition, that conflict is 'social interaction during which the actors trust in the interaction is decreasing'. This definition is used because interaction is something that can be 'observed' in the interviews and because I find that it combines the aspects of the other theories in a straight forward way. Also because I find the theory interesting and am curious about its value. To give a short review of the ideas behind the theory: trust in an interaction situation might start to decrease when the actors misinterpret or misperceive each others' actions or intentions. The actors might start to assume that the others' intentions or actions could prevent them from getting what they want. Their subsequent actions are based on these misunderstandings, which then start a downward spiral of distrust, with further actions building on and causing even more distrust. Soon the parties involved stop believing that it is possible for them to understand each other and to make themselves understood in the situation. It now feels unpredictable to them. They are not ready to continue the interaction in the same way and therefore try to do something to change it. The aim is to increase their own influence on the situation and decrease the influence of others. This makes the conflict escalate.

In the ÖVB case, there are many examples of misinterpretations and misunderstandings as well as signs of people finding it difficult to understand and trust the interaction. Some examples are when a number of landowners misinterpreted the purpose of the WKH inventories and thought they would have more serious implications for their livelihoods than they eventually did. There was also confusion about who the persons 'sneaking around in their forests' were working for. The landowners looked at both GFG and the authorities with a suspicious eye and felt that their needs were not understood. That some of the farmers reacted to the situation with anger, frustration and anxiety can easily be interpreted as a result of feeling constrained and provoked, and feeling distrust in their own ability to understand and be understood. The GFG members, on their hand, did not understand the reaction they got from the landowners and were frustrated when neither

landowners nor the authorities understood what they were talking about. I think that the situation felt unpredictable to many of the involved parties.

According to the theory outlined above, the clearest signs of conflict and distrust in the situation would be that the actors make attempts to change the situation and that these attempts fuel the conflict. Some methods to change the situation, mentioned earlier, are e.g. withdrawing from the interaction; moving the interaction to another arena; changing or questioning the other's credibility, legitimacy or image/self-perception; trying to increase ones own credibility and legitimacy; getting support for one's own standpoint and even the use of violence (Hallgren and Ljung 2005). In the ÖVB situation one can find examples of all of them. Many landowners chose to withdraw from the interaction by not talking to the GFG members. During the project group meeting where it was decided that all parties should stay in the group, FSF and Södra had thoughts of leaving the group if GFG continued. GFG's campaigns in the media and talking to persons higher up in the organisations involved are clear examples of trying to move the interaction to another arena and also to get support for their own standpoint. There were also many examples of questioning the legitimacy of others, e.g. the landowners' opinion that GFG's interest was not legitimate and gave them no right to influence forest management on private property. GFG getting renowned biological experts to confirm their inventories and standpoints can be seen as the group's attempt to lower the CFB's credibility and raise its own. As shown in the former chapter, identities were questioned and affected in many ways. Violence was even used to a small degree, both verbal accusations and destruction of property. From this discussion I conclude that there was certainly a conflict going on in the ÖVB area in the 1990s.

The central aspects of dialogue are that the participants learn from each others' thoughts and experiences in an open, respectful and constructive conversation (see Daniels &Walker 2001; Wilhelmson & Döös 2005). By understanding and respecting each others' perspectives, the members of a group create new understanding and knowledge. In the situation often described as dialogue by the ÖVB project group, it seems like the group members had come to understand and respect each others' perspectives and that they were aware of each others' needs and emotions. For instance, the landowners did learn about and come to appreciate the nature values that GFG wanted to protect, and GFG members learned about production aspects. The group also developed new ways to handle knowledge and information, e.g. what do with the results of the detailed inventories and how to inform the affected landowners. Further, it seems to me that they learned new ways to communicate in the group and also between the organisations. Indeed, constructive communication that enhanced learning brought about constructive and innovative actions, as Hallgren and Ljung (2005) say it does.

In Chapter 2, I described some of the other factors that characterise dialogue. They are e.g. good listening skills; attention to the interests of all primary parties involved; equal opportunities to participate; patience and that the parties perceive each other as equal (see Daniels & Walker 2001; Wilhelmson & Döös 2005). To what extent did the interactions in the project group show these characteristics? I think the fact that the group members gradually gained an understanding of each others' viewpoints and knowledge shows that they actually did listen to each other. It is also possible to say that the results of the ÖVB project show that an effort was made to attend to all parties' interests and to combine them as much as possible. The GFG, for instance, got their inventory results confirmed and the whole ÖVB process has fostered a more general understanding of conservation issues that

has led to many new protected areas. GFG initially wanted an even higher degree of conservation but have accepted the outcome. The landowners got clear information about what conservation areas to expect, which relieved uncertainty, and in many cases they got economic compensation for conservation.

The conflict also affected the work of the CFB and CAB, as well as Södra, and it seems that the ÖVB project has helped them to carry out their obligations in a more efficient way and in better contact with each other and the other stakeholders. I think the decision that all parties should stay in the project group contributed to equal opportunities for participation, because in a way this decision made all interests legitimate. The process was also given ample time, which means there was patience.

In spite of the account above, which shows that the ÖVB process had certain dialogic features, I find it quite difficult to say whether dialogue actually took place in the project group or not. Dialogue requires a special way of communicating, that needs some training and awareness, and I think it is unrealistic to expect meetings like the ones in the project group to be carried out as dialogues all the time. I think it is more realistic to look at dialogue the way Wilhelmson and Döös (2005, 6) do; as an 'ideal for conversation that we can strive towards'. However, building on the arguments above I think it is safe to assume that the interaction must at least have resembled dialogue in many ways.

Apart from what has been said earlier about conflict, to most people it probably means an interaction that they feel uncomfortable with, whether they are a direct part of it or not. A dialogue on the other hand is usually promoted as a more constructive and desirable way to interact and I think it also indicates a situation people feel more comfortable with. For the aim of this thesis I do not think it matters whether the situation actually was a genuine dialogue or not, as long as it was characterised by constructive interaction and felt more comfortable than the previous conflict to those involved. I would say that the situation in 2004 fulfils those criteria.

If a main aspect of conflict is decreasing trust in the interaction, then a dialogue – which is seen as a positive and constructive way to interact – should involve that the actors have trust in the interaction. My next step is to find out if this applies to the ÖVB case during the last years of the study period – the dialogue phase. As mentioned earlier, actors who distrust the interaction try to change the situation in order to increase their own and reduce the other party's influence. It follows that such attempts do not occur to any great extent if there is trust in the situation. The only exception, I would say, is when attempts are made to change the situation to the better, e.g. through meta-communication.

During this time the project group was established, and it seems that all parties, individual group members as well as the organisations they represented, accepted it as the legitimate arena to handle the biodiversity issues that were at the core of the conflict. I have not identified any attempts to move the arena elsewhere at this point in time. All the original organisations were still represented in the group, a couple of others had been added, and many if not most of the group members had been in the group from the start. What exactly went on in the project group meetings I do not know. The members did not agree on everything and most likely there were still heated discussions from time to time, but the project group frame and the way meetings were facilitated seemed to have generated the trust needed for everyone to stay. Instead of questioning or belittling each other's credibility and identity, the project group members had come to understand, trust and like

each other and had started to develop a joint ÖVB identity. I think this shows that there was trust in the interaction – that the involved parties believed it possible to understand each other and to make themselves understood.

So far I have argued that trust, or distrust, in the interaction situation played a significant role in the conflict and dialogue situations. This leads to another question: What interactions might have led to the increased trust evident in the later situation? Of course I cannot prove that certain actions actually caused trust to increase, but if the theory holds true it is at least possible to assume that they did. I will now give some examples of interactions that I think increased the trust.

Ryno Andersson's phone call to Johan Uhr at the CAB is a good starting point. He felt that '…*we cannot continue like this...*' and that there was a need to do something about the situation. I interpret this as a sign of distrust in the interaction situation and that his phone call was an attempt to change the situation. One can speculate if this was just one of many attempts going on at this time to move the arena for interaction or if it was intentional meta-communication. According to Hallgren (2003), to move the interaction to another arena is usually done in order to reduce the counterpart's influence on the situation. This is a spontaneous way to react in a conflict situation, but it might escalate the conflict (Daniels & Walker 2001; Hallgren 2003, referring to Asplund 1987). Meta-communication, or communication about the communication, on the other hand, is an example of considered, intentional response that is needed for conflict management. However, to engage in meta-communication, the actors have to overcome their inclination to react spontaneously. This is not the 'normal' way to react and therefore requires a special effort and even some courage.

Based on the interviews I believe that Ryno's phone call was a considered, intentional response; he really wanted to find a constructive way to handle the situation. In this light one might look at the phone call as meta-communication about creating an arena where it would be possible to communicate and deal with the problem in a constructive way. To phone Johan Uhr was in many ways a logical thing to do; he was in charge of nature conservation at the CAB and according to him, the CAB's role was to represent all interests. They had also had some previous contact and it seems that Ryno trusted Johan to deal with the matter. It is worth mentioning here that later on in the process, when the FSF representatives in the project group were criticised by their fellow FSF members for working with the antagonists, they showed a great deal of personal courage and strength when they continued acting in a considered way, even though it was against the norm.

This phone call led to the first stakeholder meeting in Gränna, and later to the establishment of the ÖVB project and the project group. It is possible to look at the project group as an attempt to establish one central arena to deal with the issue, instead of people pursuing their interests in all kinds of ways, creating confusion and annoyance. This took some time though. In the beginning the GFG and maybe other parties too, continued their other activities to influence the situation, which indicates that the project group was not yet looked upon as the only valid arena. There was not enough trust in it yet. However, there was also the feeling that '*if we quit the project group, then the other side will take over*', which could show that it had gained some validity, or legitimacy as the forum where the issue was dealt with. The fact that the group members continued to meet in spite of heated discussions and people only arguing their point and not listening to the others in the beginning probably also shows that there was at least some degree of trust in the process.

The project group meeting where it was decided that all the organisations should continue in the project group is looked upon as turning point for ÖVB. This is another example of meta-communication: After heated discussion it was decided once and for all who should be at the table and the GFG was also asked to stop taking initiatives outside of the group. This meeting seemed to have given the project group the final legitimacy and created more trust in the interaction situation. This corresponds to what Hallgren and Ljung (2005) say about the benefits of meta-communication; it gives the involved parties an opportunity to talk about and reflect on the communicative aspects of the situation, such as doubts and preconditions, and to agree on how to communicate in a way that would increase trust.

Another perceivable trust-building factor was the way the group meetings were facilitated. As I mentioned earlier, Johan Uhr took upon himself the role of chairman of the project group. I do not know of course how the meetings were conducted, but the other interviewees talk about how important his contribution was for keeping the group together, that he was to be trusted, and so forth. He seems to have had the competence and experience needed to keep the group together and also to intentionally create opportunities to increase the actors' trust in the interaction, as recommended by Hallgren and Ljung (2005).

Some of those opportunities involved finding things that all group members could agree on instead of focusing only on the differences. One of those things was the detailed inventories. They were not only a decision by the project group however, as the decision affected the whole country, but the results were another turning point for the ÖVB project. They gave a common understanding and shared knowledge and thus reduced the misunderstandings and differences in interpretation and knowledge that were at the root of the dispute. This reduced the distrust in the interaction that came from not understanding the other and not being able to make one self understood. There have also been many ÖVB subprojects which have given opportunity for the parties to work together on tasks they agree upon.

When they finally had the results of the inventories, the project group could start the next step, which was to decide how to handle the new knowledge. This also involved a lot of meta-communication about the best way to present conservation decisions to the affected landowners. The 'reserve package' was one result and there was also the discussion about the 'brown envelopes', information meetings, how to answer the landowners questions etc. The project group did not totally agree on the outcome, but the fact that it was discussed, and care taken to present the decisions in a clearer and gentler way than was the custom, probably helped to increase trust in the situation. It also reduced the risk of misunderstandings.

I have mentioned time as an important aspect earlier and even though it is not an interaction in itself, it seems to have contributed to the project group members feeling trust in the situation and the possibility to interact. They did not have to rush to conclusions, but could take the time needed to get to know each other and each others opinions which then led to mutual learning. As Wilhelmson and Döös (2005) write, training is needed to achieve dialogic competence, and training takes time. Dialogue requires a special way of relating to each other which

> …arises when people have attained dialogic competence. Then circumstances that
> contribute to mutual trust can be created. Such trust is fundamental for openness and

accessibility and thereby also for the possibility to learn from each other (Wilhelmson & Döös 2005, 7).

The fact that the project group existed and presented a safe forum for developing this kind of interactions seems to have been of major importance for the positive results in the ÖVB issue. An interesting thought is that these results might not have been achieved without the initial conflict. This corresponds with the ideas of Senecah (2004) and Cox (2010). By directing the engagement of the involved parties into constructive in stead of destructive interaction it was possible to use it in a positive way.

5.1 Concluding remarks

In this chapter it has been established that there was a conflict going on in ÖVB in the 1990s. There were many signs of decreasing trust in the interaction between the involved parties, which according to Hallgren (2003) can be seen as the essence of conflict. It has also been shown that, at the end of the study period, the interactions between the same parties had dialogic qualities and that there was trust in the interaction. Built on the assumption that certain forms of interaction had contributed to the increased trust, trust-promoting interactions were identified and described. They were for example: meta-communication; establishing a legitimate arena for dealing with the issue; attempts to reduce misunderstandings; and facilitation of group meetings. Also they included the determination to focus on things that everyone in the project group could agree on such as sub-projects and a common platform of knowledge; and taking care to communicate with landowners in a considerate way. Individual initiatives also played an important role, as well as giving the whole process time to mature. From this summary it is possible to conclude that the aim of this thesis – to describe the social interaction that takes place when people move from conflict to dialogue – has been fulfilled. In the introduction I also asked how it is possible to interact and communicate in a constructive way, especially if a conflict has already arisen. I think these results have shown how it is possible, at least to some extent.

Another conclusion one might draw is that to study evidences of trust or distrust in interaction situations proved helpful in gaining an understanding of the ÖVB issue. Hallgren's (2003) theory proved useful for assessing both conflict and the process from conflict to dialogue. The theory also shows that building trust in the interaction is important in situations that might lead to conflict or where conflict already exists. Further more, it indicates ways to increase trust and thereby constructive communication. However, as Ramirez (2001, 132) points out:

> It is easy to destroy trust, to rebuild it takes time. Trust-building is not something you can plan because too much intention gives an impression of calculation and creates suspicion. Trust is a wild flower that only blossoms spontaneously.

But knowing what nourishes trust can help prepare the ground.

This leads to the question whether the findings of this thesis can be applied in a broader context. I would say that some of them are context-specific, but others can probably be of general use. In the ÖVB case, individual initiatives, competence and traits were important. These aspects are of course unique to every setting. So is personal engagement – the driving force behind both the conflict and the dialogue – as well as the history of relationships and interaction that also played a significant role in this case. Still, to be aware of them and their functions might help to identify and draw on similar aspects in other contexts. However, many of the trust-promoting interactions mentioned above are

measures that could be adapted to other situations. Even though they cannot guarantee that there will be trust in the interaction, they can certainly increase the possibilities. Most of them involve skilled and considerate communication, which is something that can be learned and would enhance any kind of interaction, not only in environmental issues.

This study is mainly about interaction in the project group and the experience of its members. The ÖVB project is often referred to as a success story, but at least one of the interviewees had some doubts about how well it is anchored among those living in the area but not directly involved in the project. It would be interesting to know how they experienced this period and interaction with those involved in the project. Voices have also been heard that, for some reason, the ÖVB reference group of landowners, which has only been mentioned briefly in this thesis, has not been the same success as the project group. These are interesting subjects for further research. In general it would also be interesting to investigate further applications – and implications – of Hallgren's (2003) theory: to what extent is constructive interaction in nature conservation issues a matter of trust?

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Acknowledgements