



Norra Kärr: An Analysis of Frames, Relationships and Communication in a Natural Resource Dispute

Johannes Ekhorn

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Johannes Ekhorn

Supervisor:	Hanna Bergeå, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences SLU, department of Urban and Rural Development
Examiner:	Camilo Calderon, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences SLU, department of Urban and Rural Development
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Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

Faculty of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences

Department of Urban and Rural Development

Division of Environmental Communication

Abstract

The increasing demand for Rare Earth Elements (REE) for European Union's (EU's) green transition has intensified domestic interest in mining these minerals. However, these projects have raised local and national resistance and environmental concerns. This thesis examines how different stakeholders: authorities, mining company and civil society actors frame the conflict regarding the proposed mine of Norra Kärr and how communication (regarding the mining project) and relationship between the stakeholders interact with these frames, in a natural resource conflict.

The study is situated between environmental communication and conflict studies.

Norra Kärr constitutes a particularly relevant case due to the long period of disputes, legal process and opposition towards the mining project.

The study takes its point of departure from the progress triangle by Daniels and Walker (2001) to understand the importance of relationship dimension in natural resource conflicts. Further, the study draws largely upon framing theory by Schön and Rein (1994) and Kaufman et al. (2013), together with Habermas theory of communicative rationality. The thesis is based on a case study approach with qualitative semi-structured interviews together with document analysis.

The findings show the existence of fundamentally different frames regarding the conflict of Norra Kärr. Five different frames were identified: Mining Company Frame, Opposition Frame 1 and 2, Authority Frame 1 and 2. The Mining Company Frame perceives the project as necessary for the green transition and European resources independence. The environmental footprint is considered minimal. The opposition towards the project is by the Mining Company Frame seen to have decreased in the last years. In contrast Opposition Frame 1 and 2 perceives the project as an unacceptable risk, and the mining company is seen as speculative, and not trustworthy. Opposition is perceived to have increased. The authorities are by the Opposition 1 Frame seen as naive and lacking knowledge. The Authority Frame 1 hold the view that different interests can coexist. The opposition towards the mining project is perceived to be based on fear and misinformation. The Authority Frame 1 largely aligns with the Mining Company's. Authority frame 2 perceives a risk for impact on agriculture and forest but consider the national interest of mining a priority.

The study further shows that competing frames affected communication and relationships. Different stakeholders held completely different interpretations on what counted as fact, and thereby the was the other actor not seen as trustworthy, which in many cases led to a primarily legal relationship. Rather than leading to reframing, communication and relationship many times reinforced preexisting frames and a persistence of the dispute. However, one potential overarching frame change was discovered, along with one subframe change. But these were the only ones. As Europe and Sweden seek to accelerate mining projects, likely resulting in an increasing number of natural resource disputes, the findings in this study may provide insights for authorities, companies and civil society actors involved in future conflicts.

Keywords: Norra Kärr, Conflict, Conflict management, Communication, Relationships, Natural resources, Natural resource disputes

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Abbreviations

CAB	County Administrative Board
CABJ	County Administrative Board of Jönköping
CABÖ	County Administrative Board of Östergötland
CRMA	Critical Raw Materials Act
EU	European Union
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
LKAB	Luossavaara-Kiirunavaara Aktiebolag
LRF	Lantbrukarnas Riskförbund (Federation of Swedish Farmers)
NCG	Naturskyddsföreningen (Nature conservation group)
NIMBY	Not in my backyard
REE	Rare Earth Element
SLO	Social License to Operate
SVT	Sveriges Television (Swedish Television)

1. Introduction

According to European Union (2024) critical raw materials are of central importance for the economy and functioning of European Union's (EU's) internal market. Certain materials are considered critical due to the high economic importance and because they are exposed to a risk of supply shortage. EU relies heavily on imports of these materials. The European Union (2024) further argues that critical raw material also has a key role in enabling green and digital transition. In addition, the material is used in the defence and aerospace sector, and the demand will likely rise exponentially in the coming decade. According to the Geological survey of Sweden, Sveriges geologiska undersökning (SGU 2026), the Norra Kärr deposit contains high levels of rare earth elements. However, the extraction of raw materials can also have negative effects on both the environment and social life of humans. The proposed mine in Norra Kärr has raised a lot of disputes over the years, based on what's found in media and earlier research, see Sverige's Television, SVT Nyheter (2020) and Myloulis (2025). When EU's new mining policy became known in 2023 the issue was once again brought to public attention. SVT Nyheter (2024) reported that 13 regional and local organizations united to stop the potential mine. One of their primary concerns are the pollution ending up in the lake Vättern.

It was the theory of Daniels and Walker that sparked my interest in doing research on a natural resource conflict, and especially regarding relationships, as I will develop further in this section. Daniels and Walker (1999) argue that progress is a way of thinking about a conflict that takes into consideration that conflicts are inevitable and ongoing. Or to quote the Finnish environmental minister Sirkka Hautajarvi:

Conflicts have always been a part of human life. Without conflicts, there is rarely any progress. It is our task to face, cope with and manage conflicts. Avoiding conflicts by covering up or hiding plans and projects generally leads to greater conflicts in the end. Not only will the economic costs be higher, but citizens will lose faith in the decision-making process, and in the decision makers themselves. Ultimately, mistrust can destroy the best conflict management (Hautajarvi, 1997:1 see Daniels and Walker (1999).

I think the quote demonstrates why it is relevant to analyse conflicts. A conflict handled wrong can in worst case be costly for the society. Daniels and Walker (1999) further write that although policy conflicts are often about substantive matters, the progress most likely depends on the quality of relationships. Building on this perspective this study aims to address frames of the issues in the conflict of Norra Kärr. In addition, it will analyse how relationships, as well as the stakeholders' experiences of communication and dialogue influence these frames

and vice versa. In the light of both EU and the Swedish government's effort to speed up the processes for mining permits of rare earth elements, Sweden is very likely to experience a significant increase in the number of conflicts related to natural resource management. By examining Norra Kärr case this study seeks to shine light on what can be important to consider from a communication aspect in managing mining conflicts and disputes. It seeks to contribute to the theoretical understanding of the role of communication and relationships, in interaction with frames regarding natural resource conflicts. The case of Norra Kärr is a particularly appropriate case for studying interaction and communication between actors in a mining conflict, given its long-lasting conflict with multiple consultations, dialogues and opposition.

1.1 Purpose

The study seeks to understand how different stakeholders frame the conflict regarding the mining project in Norra Kärr and to analyse how communication (regarding the mining project) and relationships between the mining company, authorities and civil society actors, interact with these frames regarding the conflict of Norra Kärr. The purpose is to see how communication and relationships can shape the persistence or transformation of competing frames in a natural resource conflict, and how the frames shape communication and relationships. This can provide an understanding for authorities, companies and civil society actors on how to approach a natural resource dispute, where competing frames exists.

1.2 Research questions

1. How do different stakeholders (mining company, authorities and civil society actors) frame the conflict of the proposed mining project in Norra Kärr?
2. How do relationships and dialogues between the mining company, authorities and civil society actors interact with these different frames regarding the conflict of Norra Kärr?

2. Background

The following section will give a short explanation of the Swedish mining permit process. The source of the process is taken from the County Administrative Board of Östergötland (CABÖ).

2.1 The Swedish mining permit process

1. A company first applies for exploration permit to the Mining Inspectorate. If the survey shows that there exists ore in the area, the company can apply for a mining concession. The company must also be able to demonstrate that the deposit can be economically exploited.
2. Next step is application for mining concession. Environmental impact assessment (EIA) constitutes the largest part of the application. It demonstrates e.g. how people, animals, nature and environment are affected. Referrers are conducted by the Mining Inspectorate and County Administrative board (CAB).
3. If the application is approved the company is granted exclusive right to extract. However, they don't have the right to start mining yet.
4. Before extraction can begin the company need a permit from the Land and environmental court. A further EIA is required, including consultations with the supervisory authority CAB, and all other actors that can be affected, such as organizations, civil society and municipalities.
5. Land allocation determines which land the mine and its associated area are permitted to use. In order of a disagreement, the Mining Inspectorate, together with the lay accessors, are mandated to decide this.
6. The municipality manages building permits under the planning and building act. People concerned and landowners can appeal during the process (Länsstyresen Östergötland 2025)

2.2 Norra Kärr

The area of Norra Kärr has been subject to geological investigation for more than a century. Already 1906 it was known that the mountain contained rare earth metals.

The modern Norra Kärr deposit was discovered by the company Tasman Metals 2009. Since 2012, the Canadian exploration company Leding Edge Material and their Swedish subsidiary Greenna Mineral AB has performed test drilling and applied for mining permit for extraction of rare earth metals. The plan is a 150 meters deep open pit mine located 110 meters above the surface of lake Vättern, see Lantbrukarnas Riksförbund, (LRF Östergötland 2025). According to Leading Edge Materials (2026) Norra Kärr is the world's most significant heavy rare earth metals deposits, with Dysprosium and Terbium, something that is critical for magnets in electric vehicles and wind turbines.

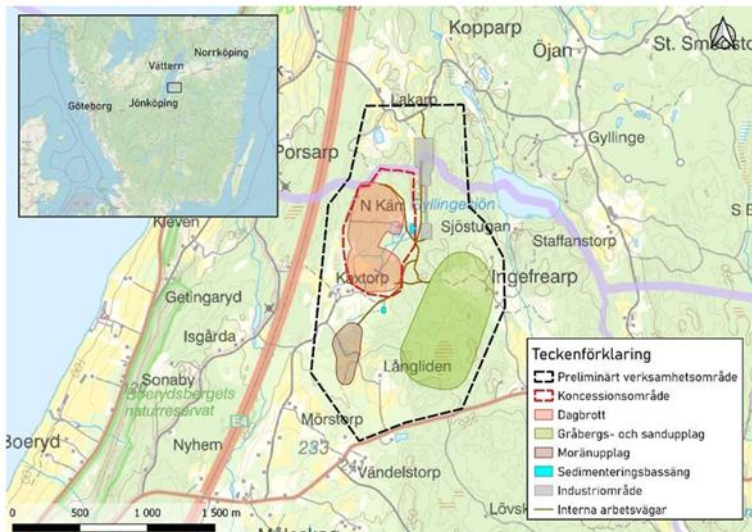
The project was granted a mining concession in 2013 but was subject to legal measures due to environmental and procedural concerns. Naturskyddsföreningen, (The Nature conservation group (NGC)) together with other stakeholders appealed to the Supreme Administrative Court. In 2016 the same court rejected the environmental impact assessment that was conducted as it only included the open pit, and failed to include waste rock areas, clarification ponds etc. which were considered necessary components. Consequently, the mining concession was annulled. The risk of impacts on Natura 2000 areas was also crucial for the decision (Naturskyddsföreningen 2018). Natura 2000 are areas with species and habitats seen to be particularly in need of protection (Naturvårdsverket 2024). In 2021 the company got a subsequent application rejected by the mining inspectorate. In 2023 EU adopted a new raw mining policy aimed at accelerating the permitting process. After this became known 13 regional and local organisations began a cooperation in an attempt to stop the mine. In May 2024 Greenna mineral announced that intended to apply for a new mining concession under the mineral act (1991:45) for mining rare earth metals (LRF 2025).

In June 2025 CAB rejected the application for a mining concession. They asked for further information about how the mine can affect the ground and water. A new application was submitted by Leading Edge Material. 3 December 2025 CABJ and CABÖ approved the application.

On 10 March 2026 the Mining Inspectorate referred the mining concession to the government. Under the mineral act this must be done if the Mining inspectorate finds sufficient ground to depart from the proposal submitted by the CAB. In this case, the matter concerned a condition for protection imposed by CABÖ relating to ecologically sensitive areas of Hålaveden, which the Mining Inspectorate did not consider necessary (Bergstaten 2026).

According to European commission (2026) selected critical raw material projects can be considered "strategic projects". These projects will benefit from

support to access finance and a shorter permitting timeframe of maximum 27 months. Norra Kärr was not included on the list of EU's first list of strategic projects. However, the mining company announced its intention to apply for the next batch of applications later in 2025. (Shanghai Metal Market 2025)



Figur 1. Overview of the proposed mining operation. Greenna Mineral AB. (2024). Unpublished environmental impact assessment of Norra Kärr. [2026-05-12]

2.3 Previous research and field of study

This study is situated between environmental communication and conflict studies. There is several previous studies on mining conflicts in Sweden, which have worked as a base for my thesis. In a recent master thesis by Myloulis (2025) Critical Raw Materials Act (CRMA) and the mining project of Norra Kärr is explored, but from a political ecology perspective, with a strong emphasis on the effects of the EU policy and China's rise of global domination in the field of REE. In contrast, my thesis focuses less on geopolitical structures and instead aims to analyse the conflict itself, the interaction and communication between the stakeholders.

McPhail et al. (2022) conducted a comparative study on the proposed Kallak mine in Sweden and New prosperity copper mine in Canda, addressing the question why certain mines fail to obtain Social License To Operate (SLO). They developed an analytical framework of process legitimacy, distributional outcomes and value compatibility. Their empirical analysis concluded that value compatibility should work as a foundational plank rather than three separate planks contributing to the SLO. In other words, alignment of values between the actors was seen as foundational. Neither a legitimate process nor a favourable distribution was seen sufficient to approve SLO if values differed significantly.

McPhail et al. (2022) concluded that the case of Kallak was a value-based conflict about human-nature relations, Sami rights, sustainable development and vision for future. Although the process was considered legitimate, the Sami Reindeer heading communities planned to continue the fight against the mine.

Richardson (2024) uses McPhail et al. (2022) framework for the proposed mines of Nunasvaara and Rönnbäck and draws the conclusion that the conflicts is closely associated with a lack of democratic rights and inability of voicing values and interests. Shortening the permit process as in the case of CRMA, will further constrain the opportunities for locals and indigenous people to gather information, voice concerns and participate in the permit process.

Both the latter studies concern conflicts in which Indigenous groups play a central role and questions of Indigenous rights is prominent. This thesis empirical contribution lies in its examination of another mining conflict in Sweden, in an area where mining historically, is not so common, and where the opposition is composed of other actors, like locals, farmers, and regional as well as local organizations.

This study has also drawn inspiration of Ratio, K (2008) work on conflict management practices, frames and role of institutions in the Finnish state forest administration. Her research demonstrated the role of frames in understanding conflicts, and theory on how to conduct a frame analysis, which influenced my work. However, instead of focusing on practices in conflict management and the role of institutions, my work focuses on how communication and relationship interact with different frames in a resource conflict.

3. Theory

The theory has its base in the Progress Triangle, which highlights the role of different dimensions in a conflict, and explains why I focus on relationships. This is followed by framing theory which will be used for research question number one, aimed to distinguish competing frames regarding the conflict of Norra Kärr. The final section draws upon Habermas theory of communicative rationality, which serves as an analytical framework to investigate the second research question; how communication and relationship interact with frames. Further detail on how the theory is used is provided in the section: Method of analysis.

3.1 Process triangle

Daniels and Walker (2001) developed an analytical framework in form of a triangle to analyse a dispute from three different dimensions: substance, process and relationship. Each corner represents one aspect the conflict.

Daniels and Walker (1999) argue that policy conflicts openly are about substantive matters, but the progress often hinges upon the quality of the relationship among the different stakeholders in the conflict. The relationship dimension includes the different parties in the conflict and their history with each other. It also includes the immaterial aspect of a conflict like respect, trust and legitimacy.

The procedural dimension considers how conflict is handled and decisions are made. This dimension includes the rules, both regulative and generative, that the parties follow when working with the conflict situation.

The substance dimension refers to tangible aspects of a conflict. These are aspects the parties negotiate about. This dimension can also include the issues the parties consider symbolic such as rectifying a past mistake (Daniels and Walker 1999).

3.2 Framing theory

Frames can be understood as cognitive shortcuts helping individuals to make sense of complex information. They are used either to interpret the world or represent the world to other people (Kaufman et al. 2013). To cite Chong and Druckman “Framing refers to the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue.” (Chong and Druckman 2007:104) One cannot perceive and make sense of a social reality without a frame. While making sense of a complex situation filled with

information there is a need of an operation of organization and selectivity which is the same as “frame” (Schön and rein 1994).

According to Kaufman et al. (2013) frames are built on structure of beliefs, values and experiences. This understanding aligns with Schön and rein (1994) that write that policy positions are resting on underlying structures of beliefs, perception and appreciation, which they conceptualize as frames. Kaufman et al. (2013) suggest that disputing actors often construct frames that diverge in significant ways. These diverging frames can affect the intractability in a conflict, while mutually incompatible interpretations of events are created (Schön and rein 1994).

Policy controversies can be seen as disputes by parties with conflicting frames. According to Schön and Rein (1994) such disputes are resisting resolution because the parities appeal to facts or reasoned argument, while holding a different view on what count as fact. The conflicting frames will decide what count as fact, are compelling, and relevant.

Interest and frames are not the same, but they are interrelated. There is a reciprocal relationship between actors’ interests and frames. Interest is shaped by frames and frames can be used to promote interest. Furthermore, the frames are grounded in institutions that sponsor (creating and promoting) the frame. Consequently, policy controversies can be seen as disputes between different institutional actors that are sponsoring conflicting frames (Schön and Rein 1994).

According to Schön and Rein (1994) a frame cannot be falsified. It is not possible to produce data that would disconfirm a frame by a qualified objective observer, because if objective is equal to frame-neutral, there is no objective observer.

3.3 Reframing

A reframing can be a frame shaped by communication and relationships, something I will consider while doing the analysis.

Kaufman et al (2013) writes that the same way a frame can alter the way a photograph is seen, it can similarly shape the way disputing parties pursue a conflict. For reframing to occur in a conflict situation, parties must be able to put themselves in the shoes of the other actor and adopt their point of view. If the communication is going to be reliable parties must be able to “provide reason” to an antagonist. The disputants also need to overcome blindness of one’s own framing, to see that multiple policy frames represent legitimate values in the conflict. Furthermore, reframing works best when changes in the context of the conflict occur where incentives to consider new perspectives increase, or in dialogue settings with strong focus on communication and building trust (Kaufman et al. 2013).

3.4 Different types of frames

As a base for my frame analysis, I will use a set of frames from Kaufman et al. (2013). According to Kaufman et al. (2013) intractable disputes are usually associated with a reinforcing set of frames. I will use the following, which fits my case, and some of which Kaufman et al. (2013) considers most important:

3.4.1 Characterization Frames

Characterization is closely linked to stereotyping in an either positive or negative way. In intractable conflicts parties often characterize the other group far from how the group sees themselves. The characterization often serves to undermine the legitimacy and motives of other actors. Al Qaeda may serve as an example. They are characterized as terrorist by the Americans but are most likely not seen as such by themselves (Kaufman et al. 2013).

3.4.2 Power Frames

Intractable conflicts are often imbedded in struggles with institutional arrangements and decision-making processes. Therefore, the conceptualization of power and social control plays a crucial role in conflict dynamics. Power frame functions both as an aid for the actor to recognize what form of power counts as legitimate. For example: legal, governmental och civil disobedience. But the power frame will also inform the actor of the form of power that is likely to enhance one's own position e.g. (authority, resource, coalition, threat etc.). Regarding conflict management, Kaufman et al. (2013) argue in another frame, that it among others is shaped by power. Some might want to sit down and negotiate. On the other hand, an actor who thinks he has the upper hand might want to solve it by litigation or violence (Kaufman et al. 2013).

3.4.3 Risk and information Frames

Future events can often involve a risk that is uncertain. When that happens disputants often construct risk and information frames that widely differ on the level and extent of the risk. These frames also shape judgement about what type of information that is seen trustworthy, and not. Risk and information frames are not only based on interest but depends on parties' expertise, level of exposure to the risk, potential for a catastrophe and to what extent the risk is feared. A person working in a war zone is likely to perceive the risk differently than a person that is not, who most likely would perceive the risk as unacceptable. A person working with oil fracking might be much less concerned about the effects of the operation than the benefits of and making money from the work. Consequently, he is likely

to see the risk differently than ordinary people living close by the wells (Kaufman et al. 2013).

3.4.4 Loss versus Gain Frames

In intractable conflicts parties often focus on threats of loss then opportunity of gains. The prevention of loss is more salient and valued than to capture a gain. In the case of fracking, people are more likely to focus on the risk of losing clean drinking water, habitat loss etc. than the potential gains in form of job creation, improved economy or less dependency on oil from foreign countries (Kaufman et al. 2013).

3.5 Challenges with frame construction

When working with frame construction there are several challenges, both practical and theoretical connected to it. I will go through some matters that according to Schön and Rein (1994:34) is important to consider when creating a frame.

Frame construction can be difficult for both practical and theoretical reasons. Regarding practical methodology. In a real policy situation, it can be difficult to know what frame underlies an actor's policy position. Rhetorical frames can be incompatible with the frames implicit in pattern of actions. Rhetorical frames contain policy stories that are persuasive and include justification and symbolic meaning, used to win alliance of many people who tacitly agree to let the portrait speak for them. One actor can, for example, argue the need of a "free market" or "community empowerment" to get legitimacy for a course of action, but the real intentions are obscured.

Secondly, the same course of action can be consistent with quite different policy frames, and the same frame can also generate different courses of action.

Another important matter to consider while creating a frame is that the meaning of a policy may change from the central government body to the local level.

Regarding conflicts Schön and Rein (1994) argues that it can be difficult to differ between conflicts that occur within frames and conflicts that are crossing frames. The result one receives of such an analysis may be grounded in the construction of the institutional and metacultural frames that underlies conflicting policy positions.

Finally, it can be difficult to judge if one deals with a potential or real shift of frame. A change in the legislation may signal a potential reframing in national policy. However, the potential frame change may not be realized based on the dependency of other reforms which might never take place. Conversely, policy

can be reframed without an open deliberation and decision, based on consistent small adaptations to a situation (Schön and Rein 1994).

3.6 Communicative rationality

Habermas Communicative Rationality will be used as an analytical framework for the second research question. It will help me analyse communication, where it fails, where it functions effectively and how it is received by other actors.

Innes and Booher (2018) see Lin (2022:5) identify three conditions for a process to be collaborative rational: 1. Agents who have power and needed information that could affect the outcome. 2. The agents depend significantly on each other in a reciprocal way. 3. Agents working on a shared task in deliberation with the use of Habermas claims of validity for authentic dialogue. In this thesis I use the third condition. Habermas distinguish between four different claims of validity:

1. Intelligibility
2. Truth
3. Normative rightness
4. Sincerity

These four will converge into a single claim to rationality. The claim is rational when the four are fulfilled. When analysing or questioning claims of validity which might seem problematic, question like this can be asked by communicating stakeholders according to (Habermas 2001:448-449):

For Intelligibility: “What do you mean by that?” or “How am I to understand that”?

For Truth: “Are things as you say”? Or “Why are the not another way”?

For Normative rightness: “Why did you do that”? Or “Why didn’t you behave differently”?

For sincerity: “Is he deceiving me? Or “Is she deceiving herself or himself?” (Habermas 2001:448-449).

These four claims of validity together with the questions can be used as analytical tools for examining the communication that have been taken place in Norra Kärr. The validity claims will be used as codes for the interview dataset. By using the validity claims, levels of trust between stakeholders can also be identified. The use of intelligibility, truth, normative rightness and sincerity can not only reveal the content in the communication but also make it possible to see how the communication is received and perceived by different actors.

Habermas (2001) claims that for a communicative structure not to produce any constraints by itself, there is a need for a symmetrical distribution of opportunities for all possible participants to choose and perform speech acts. This entails equal opportunity to employ communicative: “that is, equally distributing the opportunities to put forth interpretations, assertions, explanations, and

justifications and to establish or refute their claims to validity” (Habermas 2001:453). But as Habermas himself acknowledges, these conditions for arguments do not take place most of the time. However, I think it is a useful concept for analysing where communication fails, where it succeeds and how it is shaping conflict. It can further reveal if communication results in further or less tension between stakeholders, and whether it contributes to a persistence or change of frames.

4. Method of data collection

This study employs Norra Kärr as a case for analysing frames and communication process within a natural resource conflict. A case study is suitable when the researcher seeks to achieve an in-depth understanding of specific cases. A case study enables detailed exploration of a given problem field; this entails that the method of data collection is predominantly qualitative (Harboe 2013). A common critique of case studies is that their generalizability is considered to be poor. According to Flyvbjerg (2001) see Ratio (2008) this depends primarily on the way the case is selected. In the study of human affairs, sometimes there exists only context dependent knowledge, therefore, case studies can be necessary in gaining important depth in the analysis. Further, Yin (2003) argues that case studies are not meant to be generalizable in statistical sense to a population, but to theoretical propositions, as analytical generalization.

The data collection for this thesis is qualitative with a combination of semi structured interviews and document analysis.

4.1 Documents

For the document analysis a collection of official statements, documents and consultation materials from organizations, County Administrative Board of Jönköping, Östergötland and the mining company Greena Mineral have been collected and analysed. The most important of these documents are following:

Aktion Rädde Vättern Statement regarding consultation documents (Aktion rädde Vättern 2024).

County Administrative Board of Jönköpings Statement to the Mining Inspectorate (Länsstyrelsen Jönköping (2025)

County Administrative Board of Östergötland Statement to the Mining Inspectorate (Länsstyrelsen Östergötland 2025)

Greena Mineral AB, 2025. The Applicant's Response to the County Administrative Board's Statement. (Greena Mineral 2025)

4.2 Interviews

According to Harboe (2013) the selections of respondents of a study can be picked based on a qualified assessment, often based on qualitative interviews of key stakeholders. The respondents for this study are primarily selected for participating in a dialogue with the mining company or Authorities and vice versa, by official statements or in person. Or otherwise, been involved in the conflict of Norra Kärr.

Following Bryman (2002) the interviews were semi structured; they had several clear themes covered in an interview guide. However, the respondents had a great deal of freedom in shaping their answers, and the questions were not always answered in sequence. The interviews contributed to a deeper understanding of the relational dimension of the conflict which would be difficult to capture with document analysis only.

In total twelve interviews were conducted. The interviews lasted around 30 and 45 minutes each. Three of the interviews were carried out face to face, while remaining of them were conducted on Teams.

The respondents are following:

- 1: Member of a rural interest organisation
- 2: Member of an Environmental organisation
- 3: Member of Nature conservation group (NCG)
- 4: Member of NCG
- 5: Member of Federation of Swedish Farmers (LRF)
- 6: Member of LRF
- 7: Two locals
- 8: Local Farmer
- 9: Employee of Jönköping Municipality
- 10: Employee of County Administrative Board of Jönköping
- 11: Two Employees of Greenna Mineral
- 12: Employee of Greenna Mineral

4.3 Field trip

A field trip to Norra Kärr was conducted. I, alone, got a guided tour around the proposed mining area led by a local resident. I got the invite while looking for interviews. I saw the tour as way to gather more background knowledge about the case. The tour went around the whole proposed mining area and lasted approximately two hours. This provided valuable contextual knowledge of the mining project, insight of the scale of the project, and the areas likely to be affected. In addition, I visited the “project café” established by the mining company Greenna mineral, they recently opened to interact and provide the locals with information regarding the mining project. During the visit I conducted an interview with two employees of Greenna Mineral.

5. Method of analysis

5.1 Analysis and construction of frames

To address the first research question (How do different stakeholders frame the conflict in Norra Kärr?) interview data were primary used to analyse and construct the frames. The documents were mostly used in comparison with the data received in the interviews. An exception was the frame analysis of the County Administrative Board of Östergötland (CABÖ) which was only based on documents, due to the inability to receive an interview.

The analytical framework draws upon framing theory by Schön and Rein (1994) and Kaufman et al. (2013). As I interpret the theory, a frame is “world views” in a situation, that explains a complex word. A frame is made by a set of beliefs, values and appreciations. Methodically the frame analysis was inspired by both Fischer (1997) and Chong and Druckman (2007). As the latter writes, an initial set of frames can be used to form coding schemas, in my case I adopted Kaufman et al. (2013) set of frames regarding intractable conflicts. Since I am investigating a conflict which also persisted for a long period of time, and to some extent can be argued to be intractable, these sets of frames were considered particularly suitable for my case. Kaufman et al. (2013) argues that intractable conflicts are often made of sets of frames, some of which he considers are of more importance. The following frames were selected: Characterization frame, Power frame, Risk and information frames, Loss versus Gain frames. The reason was because they were the ones most in line with my research and interview questions and also more prominent in the data after an initial overview. I call these frames subframes. When initial frames are identified they are according to Chong and Druckman (2007) applied to a source for content analysis. Coders analyses the absence or presents of the frames in the material. In this study the subframes were operationalized as codes and applied to my interviews, in conjunction with the interview questions. To answer research question nr 1: How do different stakeholders (mining company, authorities and civil society actors) frame the conflict of the proposed mining project in Norra Kärr? the following interview questions were asked:

- Based on your experiences and perspectives, what is the conflict of Norra Kärr all about?

- Who are the key opposing stakeholders in the conflict? How do they see the conflict?

The coding process was done manually. According to Chong and Druckman (2007) manual coding offers flexibility to discover new frames that were not used in the initial coding scheme. The cost of doing it manually instead of using computer programs is lower reliability and smaller samples. Generally, more

control checks for coding reliability are necessary. The challenge was addressed by going through the material several times. Chong and Druckman (2007) further notes that this method is widely used in research on frames in communication. Among others on affirmative action, e.g. Gamson & Modigliani (1987) see Druckman (2007) or support for war e.g., Dimitrova et al. (2005) see Druckman (2007).

Besides using Chong and Druckman's method with key words, Fisher (1997) approach was used. The analysis of frames was therefore also based on broader storylines of what to be comprehended. This was considered important as frames might not necessarily be explicitly outlined in the text (Fisher 1997). I was looking for stories of "what the conflict of Norra Kärr was all about".

The subframes and stories were then analysed and constructed to different overarching frames regarding the conflict of Norra Kärr. In the case of CABÖ the analysis and frame construction contain only an analysis and frame construction based on the Risk and Gain and loss frame. These were the subframes identified in the documents. Without an interview, characterization frame e.g. was not possible to construct.

5.2 The use of Habermas

In this study Habermas' validity claims were used as analytical tool to address the second research question: How do relationships and dialogues between the mining company, authorities and civil society actors interact with their different frames regarding the conflict in Norra Kärr?

Responses to the interview questions included in the relationship and dialogue together with reframing section (see appendix) constituted the primary empirical material to answer the second research question. However, the full interview dataset was coded by intelligibility, truth, normative rightness, sincerity, relationship, potential frame change, of which the first four are Habermas validity claims, relationship from the progress triangle by Daniels and Walker (2001) and frame change from the theory of Kaufman (2013).

These categories were used to analyse the interaction and relationship between opposing stakeholders. The validity claims were incorporated in the interview questions and served as a guide to analyse how different stakeholders perceived the communication. Particularly the extent to which it was regarded to be built upon rationale arguments that were comprehensive, trustworthy, sincere and normative right. Insight generated from this analysis of communication and relationships was subsequently used in comparison with the frames. This allows for an examination of how frames, relationships and dialogue interact in the conflict, i.e. to see how communication and relationships can shape the

persistence or transformation of competing frames in a natural resource conflict, and how the frames shape communication and relationships.

5.3 My work with frame construction

While constructing a frame there are several challenges to consider. In developing these frames, I considered the challenges Schön and Rein (1994:34) discuss regarding frame construction. These include:

- The possibility that a rhetorical frame can be incompatible with the frame implicit in action.
- The fact that the course of action may be consistent with different policy frames.
- The possibility that meaning of a frame might shift between levels in a government body.
- The difficulty of judging if one deals with a real or potential shift of frame.

For further details regarding the points see my theory chapter: Challenges with frame construction.

When addressing these analytical challenges, there is a need for nuanced analysis and observation of the policy processes, especially how the utterances and actions evolve over time and at various levels (Schön and Rein 1994). In this study the latter was approached by comparing older utterances (by the CAB, the mining company, and the opposition) with newer ones, in the case they existed, and by comparing them with the interviews conducted when relevant.

At the same time, the frames must be constructed by someone, and this cannot happen with a frame neutrality. However, any given frame construction should according to Schön and Rein (1994) be possible to evaluate against relevant data, for example a text of a policy debate. The critical frame analyst should also explore if the constructs account for the things and relations the frame sponsor reveals or selectively ignores.

5.4 My position as a researcher and ethical concerns

It should be acknowledged that I have a professional background in the mining industry, having previously worked for Luossavaara-Kiirunavaara Aktiebolag (LKAB) from where I am currently on a leave due to my studies. This background may to some extents have influenced my perspectives. However, neither LKAB nor any other mining company are supporting this study, in any way or form. The fact that I am studying Environmental communication also brings balance to my

background, since it has a clear environmental profile. With this said, it is necessary to make clear that the intention or purpose with this thesis is not to adopt a normative position for or against mining. Rather, my interest is studying the conflict itself surrounding resource extraction. How groups are framing the same situation in separate ways and how communication and relationships are functioning in the conflict and interact with the frames. I see my background as a resource for providing contextual knowledge into this project, and to understand the importance and complexity of the question. This is further informed by the fact that I was born and raised in Kiruna, a town historically shaped by mining and its clashes with other interests. Finally, the selection of Norra Kärr case was a way to study a conflict linked to mining, far away from the mining operations, and company I have a background with, to as far as possible avoid any potential ethical dilemmas.

All the interviewees were informed of the purpose of this study, and that they were participating in a master's thesis which will be officially published. All interviewees provided their informed consent to participate in the study. They were informed that they could withdraw without any explanation before the study is published. The interviewees were also offered the opportunity to be anonymous if they wished, but they were also informed that they would likely be anonymised regardless, due to the potentially sensitive nature of the study.

6. Analysis

Building on the interviews (described in method of analysis) I identified five overarching frames regarding the conflict on Norra Kärr: Mining company frame, Opposition frame 1 and 2 and Authority frame 1 and 2. The following underlying subframes constitute the broader overarching frames regarding the conflict of Norra Kärr: characterization frames, power frames, risk frames and Loss vs gain frames. All the subframes investigated are common in intractable conflicts according to Kaufman et al. (2013).

“Opposition” and “oppositional actors” throughout the analysis refer to opposition towards the mining project, and the “company” refer to Greenna Mineral.

6.1 Mining Company Frame

I identified one actor holding the Mining company frame, which is the mining company Greenna Mineral. The mining company is a subsidiary of the Canadian mining company “Leading Edge Material” which is listed on the stock market in both Sweden and Canada.

6.1.1 Characterization Frame of the opposition

When asking an employee from Greenna Mineral about the opposition the employee replies:

“As an illustrative example, a national study on wind power suggests that the distribution between positive and negative attitudes can be uneven, with a relatively small proportion—around 3–4%—expressing opposition, while a larger majority, often over 80%, expresses positive views. This type of distribution may be comparable to observations from dialogue settings such as Café Greenna Mineral in relation to the Norra Kärr project.” (Employee of Greenna Mineral).

The employee here emphasized that based on the employee’s assessment the opposition consists of a limited proportion of the population. The employee further argued:

“We do not approach this as a situation of opposing actors, but as an opportunity for dialogue with stakeholders holding different perspectives. Our focus is on sharing facts and taking into account ideas that may help improve the project, with the aim of supporting coexistence across interests.” (Employee of Greenna Mineral)

This statement suggests that the company is not framing the situation as conflict but as a process of stakeholder engagement where different views can be

reconciled through dialogue. On the other hand, from the interview with the two other employees regarding opposition an employee at the mining company identify some locals and some nationwide groups such as Aktion Rädda Vättern and Urberggruppen – people and groups that are organised around environmental and nature concerns. However, another employee notes that opposition to the project appeared more pronounced during the earlier years of the concession process, while continued dialogue and information regarding the revised project design may have contributed to a shift in perceptions.

6.1.2 Power Frame

The following statement illustrates who the frame holders of Mining Company Frame see as powerholders:

“Projects like this are regulated under Swedish law and go through a rigorous permitting process with several stages of review. Various stakeholders, including environmental organizations, are invited to provide input, while the final permitting decision rests with the responsible authorities.” (Employee of Greena Mineral)”

The statement reflects elements of both Characterisation and Power Frame. It underscores that frame holders of Mining Company Frame see the authorities as primary holders of decision-making power. Environmental organizations are actors taken into consideration, their statements are considered but they are not seen as fundamental powerholders.

6.1.3 Gain and Loss Frame

The Norra Kärr mining project within the Mining Company Frame is primarily articulated in terms of resource necessity and geopolitical dependency:

“Rare earth elements are widely used in modern technologies, including applications related to energy systems, batteries, permanent magnets and advanced electronics. A substantial share of Europe’s supply is currently dependent on imports from China, with estimates varying (85-99%) across materials and stages of processing. At the same time, domestic extraction and refining capacity within Europe remains limited. These materials are generally regarded as important for the development of technologies linked to the green transition.” (Employee of Greena Mineral)

This statement reflects a gain-oriented frame, something that characterizes the Mining Company Frame. Rare-earth metals can be “gained” from the mining which is seen essential for fighting global warming. The mining project is positioned as necessary for technical development and green transition, while at the same time addressing Europe’s dependency on external sources of critical raw material. I think the mining project is in one way pictured as an environmental

project, something that will save the planet from the effects of the use of fossil fuel. However, the environmental project is seen to be in danger, unless we mine in Europe, because China can press the button and stop the export.

Another employee further emphasizes the interpretation of gains:

“This source of raw materials could contribute to meeting a share of Europe’s needs, while potentially involving a comparatively limited environmental footprint, especially when considered alongside its broader potential benefits”
(Employee of Greenna Mineral)

Here both Gain and Loss frame are evident. The project is not framed as a conflict between interests but rather a project that can generate societal gains to a low environmental cost.

6.1.4 Risk Frame and different views on the conflict

One employee of the mining company reflects on the mining process and the opposing side of the conflict from 2010 and onwards:

“Over a period of approximately ten years, significant public opposition was expressed in relation to plans for the extraction of rare earth elements combined with a chemical processing facility at the project site known as Norra Kärr. Around 2021, the project was revised and scaled down with regard to both the project area and the range of planned industrial processes. The revised project is described as focusing primarily on mining, crushing and magnetic separation.” (Employee of Greenna Mineral).

According to the employee of Greenna Mineral, earlier opposition was considerably attached to the processing method of the minerals, which involved strong chemicals. As these processes were being removed from the process design and relocated to a different area, the employee suggests that the key source of the opposition has been addressed. At the same time, the employee also said: “Some stakeholders express concerns that the project could negatively affect the environment, nature and water systems, and therefore oppose the project.” (Employee of Greenna Mineral) According to the employee the perception is anchored in the old project design, something that the mining company now is trying to fix with information activities.

Regarding risk an employee argues: “Analyses and environmental assessments conducted over the past fifteen years have not indicated a significant risk of adverse effects on the surrounding environment.” (Employee of Greenna Mineral)

As seen from the statement, the project was both before and after the revision seen as low-risk project. The view that opposition has eased due to the revision of project design clashes with actors holding Opposition Frame 1 (which will be explained in the next section) who presents a markedly different interpretation of

the conflict. Aktion Rädda Vättern (2024) addressed this issue in an official statement by responding to this statement of the old VD Eric Kraft in an interview in Näringslivets Tidning in February 2024:

“The company plans have faced strong opposition from environmental organizations, but Eric Kraft says that the opposition has eased since the project was redesigned in 2021, which including revisions for the plans for hydrometallurgical processes. “(Näringslivets tidning 2024 see Aktion Rädda Vättern 2024)

Aktion Rädda Vättern responded to the statement as follows:

“Opposition towards the mine of Norra Kärr has both become broader and deeper. Today there is a high degree of consensus, including municipal politicians, that the project is too risky. At its core the project remains the same despite the redesigned project.” (Aktion Rädda Vättern 2024)

These statements reflect fundamentally different interpretations of the significance of new project design. The oppositional actors thinks that the new design cannot resolve the core of the conflict and mitigate the risk for the water of Vättern, it is just a limited change. When asked if the new project design would still pose a risk for the environment a member of a rural interest group stated:

“Yes absolutely! In my opinion, it is the deposit. It contains a large amount of finely ground material, from rock that includes a wide range of minerals, not all of which have been fully identified. And it will leak – no matter how you look at it, it will leak” (Member of a rural interest group).

This statement reveal that the fundamental problem is not fixed in the view of the opposition.

Another concern from opposing parties of the mining project has been poisonous and radioactive material. Regarding the mineral eudialyte, measurement results show no presence of toxic substances, and as for radioactivity, samples generally show very low levels, lower than what is normally found in the bedrock, emphasizes an employee from Greenna Mineral.

6.1.5 Conclusion

Mining Company Frame: The situation in Norra Kärr is understood to concern a mining project that will generate minimal risk for the environment and the water of Vättern. Rather it emphasized that a mine would generate minerals for the green transition and a sustainable world, while at the same time limiting Europe’s dependency on China for rare Earth metals. At the same time, it is recognized that there exist an opposition that to some extent still believe there is a risk regarding both the water Vättern and the surrounding environment. Such interpretation is

seen to be based on fears rather than facts. This issue will be tackled through communication and information efforts.

6.2 Opposition Frame 1 and 2

During my analysis two broadly similar frames were identified, where the frame holders all belong to the opposition of the mine. I will go through both frames in the same section. I call them Opposition Frame 1 and 2.

The actors interviewed I recognize sharing the Opposition Frame 1 are: one from an Environmental organization, two from Nature Conservation group, two from Federation of Swedish farmers, Lantbrukarnas riskförbund (LRF), two locals, one local farmer, one from a rural interest group. The employee of Jönköping Municipality is a frame holder of Opposition Frame 2.

6.2.1 Characterization Frame regarding the company

Whitin both Opposition Frames 1 and 2 the Greenna Mineral is frequently portrayed as an unserious actor or a speculative actor:

“It is a junior exploration company. As far as I know it does not operate any active mine in the world, rather it focusses on identifying and exploring promising prospects.” (Member of LRF) Or as another member put it:

“Put this puddle at risk for a 50 000 kroner company that is trying to secure government funding” (Member of LRF)

These statements illustrate perceptions by the frame holders of Opposition Frames 1 and 2, that the mining company lacks financial capacity to implement a project on this scale, instead, it is characterized as a speculative company. Respondents express concern that the mining company might seek to sell the concession rather than conducting the extraction itself. This creates further uncertainty regarding the reliability of a future owner.

Whitin the Opposition Frame 1 and 2 the motives of the company are seen to be primarily financial. By some actors it was seen as immoral due to the perception that the project is bad, and not feasible.

6.2.2 Characterization Frame regarding the authorities and government

Two versions of the Characterization frame exist by the Opposition frame holders. The first version of the frame: *Government and authorities are wrong but not seen as opponents*. Opposition 2 frame holder possess this version:

“I wouldn’t say they are the opposition, but I am pretty sure that if they had the knowledge that we have, they wouldn’t think that this is the most appropriate place to have a mine” (Employee of Jönköping Municipality)

This frame does not portray the government and authorities as opposition or adversarial actors. Instead, they are seen to be making incorrect judgements based on insufficient knowledge or understanding regarding the area. Opposition 1

frame holders hold a more confrontational characterization frame: *Government and authorities are wrong and seen as opponents*:

“But when it comes to the government and Bergstaten I don’t know what to say, naivety, I cannot believe they mean any harm, but naivety is enormous and it cost society enormously.” (Member of a rural interest organisation)

Regarding CAB the same person says: “I can only say that I feel sorry for the public that we have CAB’s like these.” (Member of a rural interest organisation) Another stakeholder from NCG argues that CAB’s latest decision is “horrrifying”, and that are supposed to “protect nature and secure the future”.

These statements reveal a broader scepticism towards authorities, government and the decisionmakers in this case. Here the authorities are not only seen as mistaken, but as opposition since their decisions conflict with environmental protection and local interest. One can also see from the statements that the government and authorities are seen as the powerholders that should be responsible for stopping the mining project (Power Frame).

6.2.3 Risk Frame

The most prominent and recurring element in the frame of Opposition 1 and 2 is the risk the regarding contamination of the water of lake Vättern. This concern is articulated by all interviewed actors opposing the mining project. The lake’s low turnover rate is one aspect perceived as a vulnerability. When poisonous materials are introduced in the lake it will remain there for a long period of time:

“What you release this year takes 60 years to turnover. If you compare with Mälaren, it has a turnover rate of 2.5 years.” (Employee of Jönköping Municipality)

The physical condition of the lake intensifies the damage in case of contamination. Besides the lake’s physical condition, the frame holders also stretch the scale of potential consequences. If the perceived risk were to materialize, the societal impact would be substantial.

“It is a drinking water lake for 300 000 to 400 000 people. Eventually 100 000 people from Örebro might be included” (Member of an Environmental Organisation). Several actors also mention that the lake might be used for drinking water by Stockholm in the future.

An additional part of the risk frame is the geological condition of the mountain:

“From our side, vi have geologists that say one thing, and they are scientist. And from the mining company one has succeeded in finding others, that say something else. The geological structure around Vättern consist of a fault zone. One could likely find almost anything depending on where one looks, as the material in the fault has been extensively disrupted. When listening to the scientists it therefore seems, that the results can be interpreted in different ways.” (Local resident)

This statement highlights a central dimension of the conflict in which competing experts and scientist claims are mobilized against each other. Word stands against word. The term fault zone refers to an area between 2 blocks of rock consisting of multiple cracks between. The zone can be kilometres wide and exist due to movements in the crust of the earth (USGS 2026). Within the risk frame of Opposition Frame 1 and 2 the geology and cracks are seen as increasing the likelihood of the polluted process water from the mining ending up in the Lake Vättern eventually. The statement also marks that geological results can be selective, depending on interest. Considering these concerns a precautionary principle is suggested:

“A precautionary principle must be applied. The risk is extremely large... would something happen with Vättern, it would generate an immense effect on such a big area.” (Employee of Jönköping Municipality).

This statement is a core question within Opposition Frame 1 and 2. The consequences are perceived to be immense in case something goes wrong, which means one cannot afford to take any risk at all.

6.2.4 Gain and Loss Frame

The most significant loss seen in Opposition Frame 1 and 2 is the risk of losing clean drinking water in the lake Vättern, as discussed above in the Risk Frame. However, within the Opposition Frame 2 one is more positive towards the gains a mine in general can create:

“Of course, we need to make use of some of the resources available in the ground. However, the societal benefit must be greater than the harm that is caused.” (Employee of Jönköping Municipality)

The Opposition Frame 2 has a view that a mine (in general) can create societal gains with extraction of minerals. However, the place of Norra Kärr is seen as an inappropriate location for a mine. The frame holder of Opposition Frame 2 further suggests that decreasing the demand for the minerals would be a preferable course of action. Showing similarities with the Opposition Frame 1.

Frame holders of Opposition Frame 1 express a broadly sceptical view on the mining of rare earth metals in general:

“You are not reducing CO2 emissions. I cannot see that you are reducing it in any way, a mine is a very carbon intensive history. The argument of saving the climate falls apart from the start.” (Member of rural interest organisation)

This statement stands in stark contrast to the perspectives of the frame holders of the Mining Company Frame and Authority Frame 1. Within this view any “gains” for the climate are just an illusional picture. Another respondent argues:

“A mine has always consequences for the environment and nearby residents where it opens” (Member of LRF) Within the Opposition Frame 1 and 2 the emphasis on potential losses is substantial and includes a wide range of concerns including the degradation of the environment, impact on the agricultural land, loss of homes, something that already left the residents of Norra Kärr in a limbo, not sure if they dare to invest in their houses or not. While it is not necessary to detail every single loss identified, it is evident that all the interviewed actors that I consider frame holders of Opposition Frame 1 and 2, highlight multiple forms of anticipated losses. Among these, the clean drinking water of lake Vättern emerges as the most prominent concern.

6.2.5 Conclusion

Opposition Frame 1:

The conflict is understood as concerning a mining project operated by an unserious actor who put the lake Vättern, surrounding landscape and environment at a risk in pursuit of profit in the name of green transition. The authorities like County Administrative Board (CAB), the mining inspectorate and the government are seen as opponents that are naïve and lacking sufficient knowledge when not shutting down the project, which is perceived fundamentally inappropriate due to its location.

Opposition Frame 2:

Share the view with frame holders of Opposition 1, that the mining project is operated by an unserious company who put lake Vattern at risk. At the same time the actor with this frame has a more positive view on the benefits of mining in general, trying to fight the NIMBY (Not in my backyard) syndrome. But in this case the location is seen to be inappropriate. The authorities and government are not perceived as opponents but are still seen as lacking sufficient knowledge in this case.

6.3 Authority Frame

I identified two different frames from County Administrative Board (CAB). County Administrative Board of Jönköping (CABJ) I see as a frame holder of what I named Authority Frame 1 and County Administrative Board of Östergötland (CABÖ) I see as a frame holder of Authority Frame 2. However, the Authority Frame 2 is only based on the subframes Risk, and Gain and Loss Frames, due to the lack of interviews, thereby not seen as “complete” overarching frame regarding the conflict of Norra Kärr.

6.3.1 Background

According to an employee of CABJ they see themselves as an independent authority:

“We are supposed to be an independent authority that makes our decision based on facts and scientific investigations and evidence.” (Employee of CABJ)

We can conclude that CABJ sees themselves as a neutral actor that will make decisions on facts. Further, an employee of CABJ argues that CABJ ’s role as an authority to balance different interests against each other.

6.3.2 Characterization Frame

CABJ refrains from constructing an oppositional counterpart, they see themselves as an independent authority. However, as my research will show, the Authority Frame 1 is closer aligned to Mining Company Frame rather than the Opposition Frame 1 and 2.

Within Authority Frame 1, the situation of Norra Kärr is not characterized as a “real “conflict, but rather as a matter of different opinions, fears, rumours and perhaps conflicts of interest. When asking the question: Is the information of the opposition towards the mine trustworthy? I received the answer:

“I need to take into account what is relevant, and sometimes of course there are also relevant points of view. But most of the fear is connected to things that are, I would say, perhaps not relevant” (Employee of CABJ).

The perspective of the Authority Frame 1 is that the opposition towards the mine are largely driven by fear based on rumours. At the same time, the empirical data complicates the situation. The employee of CABJ describes that back in days, kids of the mining company employees were threatened. This suggests a potential divergence between the officially articulated frame (that no conflict exist) and the “the real frame” (that a conflict at least existed back in time). In this case, for some reason what Schön and Rein (1994) has named rhetorical framing might be in use.

6.3.3 Risk Frame

Authority Frame 1 and 2 diverge regarding potential impacts on agriculture and forests. CABÖ the frame holder of Authority Frame 2 writes:

“The company shall after consultation with Bergstaten and relevant CAB’s take precautions and measures to the extent required to protect the agricultural and forestry industries in the ecologically sensitive area of Hålaveden, outside the concession area, from negative consequences of mining operation.” (Länsstyrelsen Östergötland 2025)

This indicates that the CABÖ identifies a risk for the agriculture and the forest that needs consideration. The statement above is a precautionary condition they think should be included in a concession. In contrast, neither CABJ nor the Mining Inspectorate consider this condition necessary. As a result of the disagreement by the Authorities, the mining concessions were during the work with this thesis, sent to the government for decision. This is CABJ’s assessment in the case:

“The CABJ assesses that the impact is not of regional significance and therefore concludes that the mining concession applied for cannot be assumed to cause significant damage to agriculture and forestry” (Länsstyrelsen Jönköping 2025)

An employee of CABJ further explains that Östergötland is characterized by a different geography and larger farms, which may be a valid reason for raising the question. Nevertheless, the employee of CABJ argues that this is a non-issue if one considers the regional aspect. Regarding the highly debated risk for the water, the same employee states: “Vättern is ranked higher than mineral extraction. So, we weighed it that way. Then we say that we believe there is a possibility that they can coexist” (Employee of CABJ)

This illustrates a central feature of the Authority Frame 1: environmental protection and mineral extraction as seen to be able to coexist. This differs from the view of Opposition Frame 1 and 2 which frame holders sees the risk for contaminating lake Vättern as unacceptable. Oppositions arguments are seen to be sweeping and non-factual by the CABJ. The reason CABJ sees coexistence as possible is revealed in the next statement regarding risk:

“There is no evidence that so much could be released. So much of anything. No chemicals are being used, so this operation is pretty much comparable to a quarry.” (Employee of CABJ).

This interpretation of the environmental risk aligns closely with the Mining company frame where the risk is minimized. Thereby is coexistence possible too.

6.3.4 Gain and Loss Frame

Even though perceiving a risk CABÖ also sees there is something to “gain” from the extraction:

“Against the background of the high socio-economic value represented by the deposit at Norra Kärr, CAB assesses that, in a balancing of the need to protect ecologically sensitive areas and the need to extract the deposit, priority should be given to the extraction of metals.” (Länsstyreslen Östergötland 2025)

Here we can see that CABÖ perceive the existence of a risk of loss, but that socio economical values are big enough to let the extraction of minerals be prioritized. However, CABÖ place a great emphasis on minimizing the impacts on the farms and forestry arguing that the mining company should use alternatives, with the least direct impacts when designing operations and technical solutions.

The CABJ emphasize the importance of the minerals:

“It is often said that they are important for the green transition.”

(Employee of CABJ)

The Employee of CABJ emphasize the need of the metals for the green transition and technical development due to the magnetic in the minerals. But the employee at the same time acknowledges that it is not them that point out national interest. I found it to be the Geological Survey of Sweden, (Sveriges geologiska undersökning, SGU) (SGU 2020).

The following is SGU when writing about Rare Earth Elements (REE): “In addition to being used in everyday electronics, they are important for modern green technology, for example in wind turbines and electric vehicles.” (SGU 2026) Besides the green the technology SGU further emphasizes that Norra Kärr is interesting location due to economic and environmental aspects, with high levels of the REE and low levels of Uran and Torium (SGU 2026). It is this national interest CAB leans towards when weighing different interests in Norra Kärr. The statement is in stark contrast to the opposition’s claims regarding the risk of radioactive material.

6.3.5 Conclusion

Authority Frame 1:

According to this frame a fundamental conflict in Norra Kärr does not exist, rather a potential conflict of interest. However, opposition towards the mining project is acknowledged whose arguments are seen to be based in fears. The mine of Norra Kärr is viewed to be a national interest which should be weighed towards other national interests. In doing so the mining is perceived to be able to coexist with other national interests, where risks and losses are seen as minimal.

Authority Frame 2:

As the national interest of mining is viewed to be large, the interest of the mining industry is prioritized over protection of biologically sensitive areas, however, due to the anticipated risk for the agriculture and forest, it is seen necessary for the mining company to take precautions as far as possible.

6.3.6 Conclusion Chapter 6.3

The frame analysis demonstrate that the stakeholders interpret the conflict of Norra Kärr through fundamentally different frames, which diverge with regard to substantial issues, risk assessment and perceptions of the conflict itself. Without the use of frames, the conflict could for example have been only interpreted as disputes regarding economical interest or lack of information regarding the project or environmental impact. However, the analysis shows that the stakeholders does not only disagree on consequences of the mining project but also what count as legitimate expertise, relevant risk and rational decision-making. The frames shape how the different actors interpret scientific evidence and how the conflict itself is perceived. Within the Authority and Mining Company Frame the opposition is perceived as having decreased over time. In contrast, within the Opposition Frame 1 the opposition is seen to be increased, the company is seen as a non-serious actor, and the Authorities as naive. The findings also demonstrate that the disputes are not only about the mine itself, but about values, views on green transition and human-nature relations.

6.4 Relationships, dialogues, and the interaction with frames

This subchapter will investigate research question number two: How do relationships and dialogues between the mining company and other stakeholders interact with their different frames regarding the conflict of Norra Kärr? Habermas communicative rationality will be used as an analytical framework to investigate communication, where it fails, succeeds and how other actors receive it. The subchapter consists of three sections: Mining companies, Opposition and County Administrative Board of Jönköping (CABJ) view on the relationship and dialogue. Furthermore, it includes an analysis of how the relationship and dialogues interact with the stakeholders' different frames.

6.4.1 The Mining Company's perspectives on relationship and dialogue

When asked how the dialogues with the people concerned with the mining project have unfolded, an employee characterizes the dialogues at Café Greenna Mineral as constructive and taking place in a calm setting. It is further suggested that these interactions, in some cases, contribute to a reduced level of concern, as some visitors report feeling more reassured after visiting the café. The employee also expresses the view that certain concerns may, at least in part, be linked to perceptions or uncertainties rather than to verified facts.

We can see that communication might in some cases have contributed to less concerns and improvement of the relationship among civil society actors, but this was not expressed by the actors I interviewed.

However, when the communication is examined more closely through the lens Habermas communicative rationality, the characterization of the dialogue appears more complex. Although employees of the mining company describe the interactions as open and relaxed, underlying tension emerges when connecting the questions to Habermas four validity claims. Communication from what I see as opposition is not perceived as fully intelligible as it is understood to be grounded on concerns and perceptions rather than facts. Consequently, the information provided by the opposition are regarded not trustworthy.

Regarding the intelligibility of the information of the opposition, another employee states that the information is understandable but add:

“It is noted that a number of the consultation questions concern issues that will be assessed in greater detail during subsequent stages of the permitting process. At the current stage, prior to an exploitation concession, the project is supported by a preliminary environmental impact description. At the same time, extensive investigations conducted over approximately fifteen years have contributed to a

substantial knowledge base regarding the geological formation, hydrological conditions and surrounding environment. Further detailed analyses and a comprehensive environmental impact assessment are expected to form part of the environmental permit application process.” (Employee of Greena Mineral)

The statement illustrates that the communication regarding concerns raised by the opposition is seen as intelligible, but the employee from the mining company makes it clear that the requests for clarifications or answers to some questions cannot be addressed at this point of the mining permit process. The environmental impact assessment is nevertheless seen robust. From this perspective the oppositional actors are seen as raising legitimate questions, but in the wrong procedural context; those questions should be examined at a later stage. A change in the law took place in 2024. Natura 2000 permits should be issued after rather than prior to the approval of a mining concession. Despite this change Aktion Rädda Vättern argue that there still exists a double assessment of the effects on the environment according to the environmental law:

“The company thus realizes that the double assessment exists but seems to believe that in connection with the processing concession it can be done with ‘consideration of the current state of knowledge’. This could be interpreted as suggesting that it is acceptable to have insufficient knowledge about the project's environmental impact” (Aktion Rädda Vättern 2024).

Here the environmental impact assessment is not seen as robust enough. The different interpretations of the law also influence what each side considers to be relevant information and appropriate topics for communication. This points to a dimension that is not fully captured by the Habermas test of validity claims. Even if the information is perceived to be sincere, true and the motives normatively correct, communication may nevertheless fail and not be seen as rational if parties disagree on the procedural context or appropriate timing in raising a question.

When the mining company was asked whether the interaction with oppositional actors changed the company's view in any way, one employee responded:

“The original project concept was subsequently revised in light of both the permitting process and the broader public discussion surrounding the project. The revised concept aimed to establish a more sustainable and locally adapted project design by limiting the planned operations at Norra Kärr to mining, crushing and magnetic separation. These revisions may also be viewed as reflecting concerns and perspectives expressed during stakeholder and community dialogue processes.” (Employee of Greena Mineral)

Here we can see that the interaction between the Mining Company Frame and the Opposition Frame 1 obviously changed the scale of the project. But did a frame change occur? In an earlier statement the mining company argued that research over 15 years show no significant risk (found in the risk section), this indicates

that any broader frame change regarding the conflict of Norra Kärr did not occur. The overarching frame is still there, rather a change in a subframe accrued. I argue according to the findings that a shift occurred in what Kaufman et al. (2013) describe as a Power Frame. Within this frame the resistance from the opposition is perceived strong enough for the project to be scaled down to obtain social approval.

6.4.2 Oppositions perspectives on relationship and dialogue

Relationship and communication between Opposition and the mining company

When asked about the relationship with the mining company, a member from NCG emphasizes the lack of a relationship with the mining company:

“My experience is that we don't really have a relationship. My experience is that it often works through other parties. Because they apply to the Mining Inspectorate, and then we involve our lawyer, so it's very legal, it's a legal relationship.”
(Member of NCG)

The notion of a primary legal relationship between the mining company and the opposition is emerging in several interviews with the opposition. One of the reasons for it will be explained by another person from NCG:

“When they invite you to a consultation like this, you must be aware that they use it 'we have had consultations with the parties, we had consultations with local residents and associations around'. And they use it roughly as now you agreed to move forward. They use it as a part of the process. (Member of NCG)

This statement reveals that few people holding the Opposition Frame 1 want to participate in consultations due to lack of trust, and fear that it will be used as a tacit agreement to move on with the mining project. This can also be an explanation for the primarily legal relationship between the frame holders.

One actor that visited the café at Greenna Mineral argued that the mining company: “Could not answer any questions at all” (Member of a rural interest group). Others relied on second hand stories of others visiting the café, these were reinforcing the scepticism regarding the effectiveness of such a visit.

These arguments present two critiques toward the mining companies' communication efforts. First, you do not get any relevant information that you seek when you are visiting the café. Secondly the act of openness and communication itself by the mining company is seen as a strategic move to make it possible to advance in the mining process. Because of these two arguments, several from the opposition have made an active decision not to visit the café.

A further point of critique from the opposition towards the mine concerns the intelligibility and accessibility of the information from the mining company:

“Everything was in English; I think of all the older people who live in the countryside, who may not be able to read technical terms in English either. We are still the updated (Local resident)

This statement highlights how communication barriers like language limit the comprehension of communication for certain groups. The local does not only speak for herself but also emphasize the potential exclusion of the older residents in Norra Kärr. Beyond the problem of intelligibility, a more fundamental lack of trust in the mining company is also evident:

“And then we sent some questions afterwards that we wanted answers to. But they did not want to answer them in writing, they just said that we could have another meeting down here in Gränna. But then we said that we weren't interested”
(Member of LRF)

From a relational perspective the dynamic in the statement has potential to further decrease trust between the actors. The mining company might see the demand for written communication as attempts of the opposition to discredit the company's position. Oppositional actors on the other hand may interpret the unwillingness of written communication as a lack of transparency, raising questions about whatever certain questions are withheld. This mutual suspicion might have contributed to a cycle where communication practices themselves became a conflict. Several frame holders of Opposition Frame 1 also said that they wanted their lawyer to take part in discussion, but that the mining company has refused that arrangement.

When asking one Opposition 1 frame holder if the information from the mining company is understandable, I received the answer:

” Yes, it is understandable, but it is not true in any way. I don't have the actual letter in front of me now, but it talks about the green transition much more than it talks about the mine, and that's just not true. This does not contribute to a green transition in any way.”
(Member of a rural interest group)

The statement illustrates a distinction between intelligibility and truth. While the information is considered understandable it at the same time considered misleading and untrue. The view that the information and communication from the mining company is not true is shared by Opposition 1 frame holders, whether it regards the green transition or the risk of contamination of Vättern.

Regarding the sincerity of the mining company, one respondent answered:

“However, I think that if they had been both more open and more like: we see these problems and we can solve it in this way. And if other experts, who are not their own said: this can be solved in this way to handle it safely.”
(Employee of Jönköping Municipality)

This statement shows that the mining company is not perceived as sincere by frame holders of Opposition Frame 2. There is a view that the mining company is aware of potential risks but is attempting to downplay or cover it.

While asking if there is anything the mining company could change in their communication that might change their view in some way the response differs:

“You can’t put lipstick on a pig” (Local) That response indicate that no matter how the project is presented it would still be regarded negatively. Beyond demonstrating a fundamental lack of trust for the mining company, this statement reveals that the actor is firmly entrenched in the frame. Another frame holder of the Opposition Frame 2 appears more flexible in case the mining company would be more open of the risks:

“But like being more transparent that, yes, we know that we're taking a risk. It can be a bit of a nonchalant experience of not getting to the bottom of it. That you're aware that you're making an intervention in the earth” (Member of NCG).

I consider this quote (together with the one of the employee of Jönköping municipality above) as example of small openings for possible frame change. That frame change would however entail a change in the communication regarding the risk by the mining company, but also an independent verification of a neutral third party, showing again a mistrust towards the mining company.

During the analysis, one potential frame change was identified in relation to an actor belonging to the Opposition Frame 2, namely the employee of Jönköping Municipality, who stated:

“And then we in the municipality, in the beginning, I would say that back then people were quite thoughtful and questioning about this and thought that it could be useful both in terms of jobs and these minerals that are up there. Then as we have seen more of this company, and the fact that knowledge has been increased among both decision-makers and the general public in the area, the scepticism has grown towards it.” (Employee of Jönköping Municipality)

This statement suggests that the employee of the municipality initially was leaning more towards the Authority Frame 1 than Opposition Frame 1. Early perceptions included potential economic benefits in form of employment opportunities and resources utilization. Over time, the employee indicates that the increased knowledge contributed to increased scepticism towards the project. The potential frame change might have been influenced by engagement with other frame holders of the Opposition Frame 1. Several frame holders of the Opposition Frame 1 refer for example to the same journalist as the employee of Jönköping Municipality did, when explaining their view on the establishment of the mine.

Relationship and communication between Opposition and CAB

While asking if the information regarding the mining project from the CAB is understandable, one frame holder of the Opposition Frame 1 replied:

“The Swedish is not exactly easy to read.” (Member of NCG)

This reveals that communication might fail due to lack of what Habermas would call intelligibility. When further asked if the information from CAB is perceived sincere, the same member replies:

“I'm doubtful, sometimes. Since the authorities are connected to laws, parliament, government and such. I think of not only those authorities, but all authorities in general, they can be swayed and influenced by different things” (Member of NCG)

For some actors holding the Opposition Frame 1 the information of the CAB is argued to be hard to understand. The trustworthiness of the information is doubted at times, and one speculates that CAB is influenced by the power from other authorities while taking their decisions.

Interviews with actors from the opposition indicate that the relationship with the CAB is somewhat strained. A respondent describes the relationship like this:

“However, we have not received direct support from the CAB either. The CABJ, in particular, has been somewhat dismissive, to put it plainly.”
(Member of NCG)

One situation that weakened the trust between the opposition and CAB was the CAB's decision to recommend approval of the mining concession in December 2025. I think many from the opposition saw this as a frame change of CAB.

“But after the latest from CAB, I'm just horrified. These should be our experts in this field, who are supposed to protect nature and secure our future here. And then they still choose to approve.” (Member of NCG)

This reaction suggests that some of the actors from the opposition had assumed that the CABJ shared the same view and scepticism of the mining project, particularly given the earlier rejection of the concession. According to CABJ the approval was not because they had changed their mind. An employee argued that the decision to say no to the concession was because the material from the mining company was not sufficient. In the latest round, CAB was satisfied with the material and approved the concession. The member argues that this should not be seen as an approval of a mine per se, but as approval to continue the next stage of the mining permit process. The decision was also based on the new law of Nature 2000, which the same employee said made it possible to decide about land use later in the environmental permit process. These developments appeared to have deepened the divide between opposition and CAB. The opposition argue contrary

to CAB that the mining company according to the law, are still bound to make a more complete environmental assessment.

While asked if interaction with any actor changed the CAB's view in any way, the employee of the CABJ replied, that it is not the relationship or communication between the mining company and the mining inspectorate that have affected their view, but their own "competence development". I interpret this as indicating that they see themselves as independent actors, and in extension, that their frame is not influenced by other actors, but by facts.

6.4.3 County Administrative Board of Jönköping's view on relationship and dialogue

The employee of CABJ describes the relationship with the mining company as being reasonable over time. The employee explains that CAB sometimes makes demands that the mining company has questioned, such interactions are seen as a normal part of the regulatory process. At the same time, the employee notes that the mining company have been cooperative in proving requested clarifications and supplementary information. When asking if the employee trusts the information they receive from the mining company the employee answers:

"Yes, I think what they have stated is reasonable and relevant. So, I trust that. But the Swedish legislative system is also structured with its own control."

(Employee of CABJ)

As I understand the statement, the employee wants to underscore that the authority cannot simply trust an actor but emphasizes the authority's responsibility to independently verify the information. However, the employee acknowledges that the employee thinks the information is to be trusted. The employee further explains the information is perceived as sincere but argues that it is hard for the employee to know if the mining company has any hidden agenda. The information is also seen as intelligible for the CAB, but the employee says that it is also a competence question.

Regarding the relationship and dialogue between the mining company and the opposition the employee reflects on a shift over time:

"From the beginning, the mining company had an ambition 15 years ago to be open, meet people and share as much as possible. They had a lot of information meetings. But it backfired on them, because there was a bit of a witch hunt on some, I think, of the company's management, of those who showed up, some of their children were threatened and so on "(Employee of CABJ)

According to this interpretation such incidents may have contributed to a deterioration of the dialogue between the mining company and oppositional actors. The employee thinks that the mining company has shifted to a more formal way of communication via application processes and authorities. This example

shows how experiences in a conflict can reshape communication practices and how communication can reshape the view of the conflict. However, as mentioned earlier, the mining company have now opened an information café which indicates that the communication practices have changed again.

Regarding the relationship with the opposition an employee of CABJ reflects on the reaction of their statement in December:

“We received number of irritated emails after the statement we made in December. Where they questioned why we said yes to a mine. That is also the media's way of expressing it. We have said yes to moving forward with the process, but what the mine should look like is an environmental assessment issue.” (Employee of CABJ)

I think the statement can be seen as a deterioration of the relationship between the opposition and the CABJ, something also confirmed by the opposition, see section: *Oppositions view on the relationship and dialogue*.

While asking the question whether the information by the opposition regarding the mining project is sincere and to be trusted, an employee from the CABJ replies:

“They are probably sincere, but I don't know how good they are at finding out facts and truth. How interested people are in spreading that kind of scaremongering. It probably happens too. And it doesn't have to be out of malice; it can be out of lack of knowledge. (Employee of CABJ)

This statement reflects an ambivalent stance towards the credibility of the communication of actors holding the Opposition Frame 1. The employee is not clear when asked if the information by the opposition is to be trusted but says that she needs to take into consideration what is relevant and facts, which sometimes are seen to be the case and other times not. From an analytical perspective this indicates a partial eroded trust where the communication of the opposition is sometimes interpreted by CABJ as partly rhetoric used to further increase the fear of the mining project. In this case, what Habermas calls communicative rationality, appears to be weakened.

6.4.4 Conclusion Chapter 6.4

The relationship and communication between frame holders of Opposition Frame 1 and 2 and the Mining Company Frame cannot be understood to have facilitated any overarching convergence or transformation of frames. The findings however suggest a change in the Power Frame of the Mining Company Frame due to dialogue and resistance from the opposition. Within this frame the resistance from the opposition is seen strong enough for the project to be scaled down to obtain social approval. The revised design does not fix any fundamental risks and concerns according to the frame holders of Opposition Frame 1. According to the

mining company some oppositional actors felt less concerned after visiting the café, which might be the case, however, these oppositional actors are not found in my data. Rather the findings suggest that the interaction between the parties has reinforced existing frames and deepened oppositional actors (I interviewed) mistrust towards the mining company. The result of the efforts from the mining company to promote openness and initiation of meetings was by the frame holders of Opposition Frame 1 not seen as a genuine arrangement but as strategic attempts to demonstrate procedural legitimacy. For most of the actors interviewed holding the Opposition Frame 1, communication and interaction with the mining company appear to have generated further mistrust rather than improved relations between the parties.

Communication between the mining company and CABJ seemed to work effectively, and the Mining Company Frame and Authority Frame 1 also share similarities.

Among some actors holding the Opposition Frame 1 and 2, respondents regarded the information from the mining company as lacking intelligibility, particularly due to language barriers and technical complexity of the material. All of them consistently questioned the truthfulness and the sincerity of the information and the company's intentions. By contrast the frame holders of Mining Company Frame sometimes thought the information from opposition to be intelligible but viewed them as not based in fact and correctness but rather based on perspectives and concerns. The same argument about the opposition was made by the frame holders of Authority Frame 1. Across these competing frames the communication did not generate a mutual understanding, rather the analysis shows that the relationship between the frame holders of Opposition Frame 1 and both Mining Company and Authority Frame did not change their frames, rather it consolidated their pre-existing frames.

Competing frames also interacted with relationships and communication between stakeholders. The conflict is characterized by competing claims to expertise and legitimacy. Experts are mobilized against other experts, fact stands against other facts, lawyers work against other lawyers and interpretations of the law are different from other interpretations of the law. Previous conflicts, experiences of mistrust, the view of non-rational communication, accounts of threats and hostile interactions may have contributed to increasingly expert-driven juridical relationships between the parties.

One potential frame change was nonetheless identified in relation to the employee of Jönköping municipality. Initially the employee was more in line with the Authority Frame 1 emphasizing potential economic benefits. Over time the frame changed to the Opposition Frame 2. According to the findings, the reason for the change can have been influenced by communication with experts and

journalists, some the same as referenced by frame holders from Opposition Frame 1.

7. Discussion and conclusion

7.1 Summary of findings

The thesis has examined different frames regarding the conflict of Norra Kärr and how relationship and communication between the stakeholders interacted with the frames. Five different frames were identified: Mining company Frame, Opposition Frame 1 and 2 and Authority Frame 1 and 2. Rather than producing a transformation and convergence of competing frames, communication and relationship largely reinforced the existing frames. An exception was the case of Opposition Frame 2. The findings support the theory of Schön and Rein (1994) that conflict can persist and resist resolution because actors appeal to fact while simultaneously disagree what count as facts. According to Schön and Rein conflicting frames will decide what counts as fact. In the conflict of Norra Kärr different stakeholders had different views on what was regarded as facts and framed the situation in radically different ways, among others: as an opportunity for the green transition, an unacceptable environmental risk, or a possible coexistence. The different frames made communication difficult because the opposing parties' claims were many times not seen as rational from the start.

The conflict of Norra Kärr was characterized by the involvement of expertise, scientists, and lawyers. Rather than resolving the conflict or converge frames, expertise was incorporated into different preexisting frames. However, one change in the Power Frame of the mining accrued due to dialogue and resistance. Within this frame the resistance from the opposition is perceived strong enough for the project to be scaled down, i.e. remove the chemical process and occupy a smaller area, to obtain social approval.

7.2 Central subframes

Two subframes were central in the findings. The Risk Frame and Gain and Loss Frame:

Risk perception was a clear dividing line between the frames. Frame holders of Authority Frame 1 and the Mining Company Frame did not see a risk for the environment and Vättern, while the Opposition Frame 1 and 2 saw the risk as unacceptable for an operation to take place. The findings confirm the theory of Kaufman et al. (2013) regarding risk. For example, when Kaufman (2013) argues that employees at an oil company who make profit from fracking do not have the same risk perception as someone living close by the wells. Similarities can be seen in this case; the mining company who will make profit from the mining does not have the same perception of the risk as the locals interviewed.

The findings also support the theory by Kaufman (2013) regarding loss verses gain. As his theory suggests, most actors in a conflict focus on the threat of loss rather than gain. As we clearly can see from the analysis most of the oppositional actors interviewed focused on the loss a potential mine would contribute to, while the mining company and CAB emphasized the gains.

7.3 Why communication failed, Why legal approaches were used and Ways forward

Although communication by the mining company often was seen as open and constructive, the findings show that communication rarely met conditions for communicative rationality. Actors from Opposition Frame 1 frequently questioned the intelligibility, truth, sincerity and motives of the mining company and CAB. At the same time, the mining company and CABJ perceived oppositional claims to be based on fears rather than facts. This shows that communication or the relationship between the different frame holders broke down (almost cease to exist or function badly) not mainly because of lack of opportunities to communicate, but because of the way communication was performed. I argue that if the application of Habermas validity claims leads actors to perceive what is communicated as invalid, that the validity claims cannot be trusted, the communication and the reasonable dialogue start to deteriorate. For example, if the motives behind establishing a relationship and a dialogue with the public and organizations, are not seen to be sincere, but instead understood as serving strategic self-interest, the willingness to continue the communication is diminished. Similarly, if the information provided by one part is regarded as not true, further dialogue might be perceived as not only a waste of time but also involves the risk of manipulation. This interpretation is also in line with the theory of Kaufman et al. (2013). According to the theory, actor's willingness to negotiate depends on their assessment of perceived power. Depending on who you perceive having the upper hand will decide whether you will benefit from negotiating or not. This might explain why many frame holders of Opposition Frame 1 chose not to go to the café of Greena Mineral and participate in a dialogue. Rather than trying to hold a reasonable dialogue, one is using the juridical way, which might include more power and limit the risk of manipulation. I argue that the juridical way is not the same as Habermas rational dialogue. The juridical is not concerned with whether the information is normative correct or sincere, but whether the information is true and according to the law or not. Given that the parties hold different interpretations on the law, it is understandable that they seek judicial review as a way of resolving the dispute.

As the theory of Kaufman et al (2013) suggests regarding frame change: if the communication is going to be reliable, parties must be able to "provide reason" to an antagonist. This is consistent with Habermas theory of communicative

rationality. There are countless examples of distrust between the actors in the empirical findings, where the “reason” is not sufficiently provided to the antagonist which may have contributed to breakdown of communication. Trust issues, breakdown of communication and a dominance of juridical relationship can be explanations for why conflict persists and reframing has not taken place in most cases during the years.

The findings show that competing frames can be difficult to converge. However, if the aim is to facilitate convergence between frames, or at least reduce the intractability of the conflict, the findings suggest that the communication, consultations, and referrals (regarding the project in general) conducted so far, have been insufficient. In line with the theory of Kaufman et al. (2013) I argue that there would be needed changes in the context of the dispute that make actors more open to new perspectives. Dialogues at the café can be such a context, if it leads to an improved relationship. However, based on the finding, I suggest that more explicit forms of frame reflection and conflict management are needed, where stakeholders actively attempt to understand each other’s perspectives, and where there is a strong focus on communication and building trust. That insight can also be applied to other ongoing and future natural resource conflicts.

7.4 Challenges with the frame analysis

One particular challenge encountered during the analysis was to distinguish between potential rhetorical frames and “real frames”. For example, regarding Authority Frame 1 and Mining Company Frame the conflict may in practice have been more of actual conflict compared to how the actors framed it. As Schön and Rein (1994) argue one must take a look if the frame can be tested against relevant data. In this case, the frame holders of Opposition Frame 1 and 2, framed the situation of Norra Kärr as a conflict. If one side experiences and articulates the situation as a conflict it becomes difficult to sustain the claim that no conflict exists. The empirical evidence also indicates that conflicting interest due to the mining project exists between actors. It also shows that an actor holding the Authority frame 1 described the historical situation in ways that reasonably could be considered as a conflict, e.g. references to threats of individuals involved. At the same time, it might also be argued that the opposition can possibly frame the situation as a wider conflict than “the reality”, due to rhetorical and strategic reasons. If the opposition towards the mine is seen to be widespread and socially significant, it is more likely to increase its influence of the decision-making process.

7.5 One potential frame change and future research

As described in the conclusion 6.4.4, one potential frame change was discovered by the employee of Jönköping Municipality. This shift appears to have been influenced in part by communication with experts and journalists, some the same as referenced by frame holders of Opposition 1 frame. A characteristic of frame change can be the willingness to change the mind. This is illustrated by an employee of the Jönköping municipality who stated: “One need to be open and not locked if new facts emerge.” Such openness toward changes together with what Kauman et al (2013) describes as the capacity to place oneself in the position of others can be an indicator for where frame change is more likely to occur. Further analysing characteristics for frame change would be an interesting task for future research which can contribute to an understanding under which circumstances competing frames may converge and thereby contributing to more effective conflict management.

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Popular science summary

Increased demand for Rare Earth Elements (REE) for European Union's (EU's) green transition has sparked mining disputes in Sweden. One of them is the proposed mining project in Norra Kärr near Gränna in southern Sweden. By interviews and document analysis this thesis examines different stakeholders: authorities, mining company and civil society actor's world views, or "frames" regarding the conflict of the proposed mine in Norra Kärr, and how communication (regarding the mining project) and relationship influence the "world views" and vice versa. The findings show that different stakeholders hold fundamentally different views regarding the conflict of Norra Kärr. I identified five different "world views" which I named Mining Company Frame, Opposition Frame 1 and 2, Authority Frame 1 and 2. Mining Company Frame views the mining project as necessary for the green transition and European resources independence, and the environmental footprint is considered minimal. Opposition towards the project is perceived to have decreased last years. In contrast Opposition Frame 1 and 2 perceives the project as an unacceptable risk, the mining company is seen as speculative and not trustworthy. Opposition towards the project is seen to have increased. The authorities are by the Opposition Frame 1 seen as naive and lacking knowledge. The Authority Frame 1 perceives the opposition in Norra Kärr as based on fear and misinformation and holds the view that different interests can coexist. That perception largely aligns with the Mining Company Frame. Authority Frame 2 perceive a risk for forest and agriculture but consider the national interest of mining to be a priority.

The study shows that competing "world views" affect the communication (regarding the mining project) and relationships between authorities, mining company and civil society actors. Different stakeholders held completely different interpretations on what counted as fact, and thereby was the other actor not seen as trustworthy, which in many cases led to a worse relationship. Rather than leading to a change of "world views" communication and relationship between stakeholders many times reinforced preexisting ones, and persistence of the dispute. On one occasion, a more fundamental change in one actor's understanding and perception was found.

The results can contribute to a better understanding of how communication and relationships affect the perceptions and fundamental understandings of different stakeholders and vice versa, and in that way shape environmental resources conflicts. As Europe and Sweden seek to accelerate mining projects, likely resulting in an increasing number of natural resource disputes, the findings in this study might provide insights for authorities, companies and civil society actors involved in future conflicts.

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Appendix 1

Interview guide (Mining company/Civil society actors)

Background

- Can you tell me about yourself/your organization/company?
- How long have you been involved in this case and what is your role?

For frames

- Based on your experience/perspective, what is the conflict in Norra Kärr all about?
- Who are the key opposing stakeholders in the conflict? What is their view of the conflict?
- Who is the “we” in these conflicts?
- Who are “they” in these conflicts?
- How do you perceive the motives of opposing stakeholders? What do you think about that?

For relationships and dialogue

Can you describe the relationship between your organization/company and the opposing stakeholders?

- Has the relationship changed over the years? In what way?
- Can you describe the experience of dialogue and communication with opposing stakeholders?
- Do you feel that your organization/company has been heard and taken seriously in the dialogues?
- Is the information from the opposing stakeholders understandable?
- Do you feel that you can trust the information from the opposing stakeholders?
- Do you think the opposing stakeholders are sincere in their communication?

Reframing

- Has the interaction with opposing stakeholders changed your organization's/companies view on the issue in any way over the years? If yes what, and why?
- What needs to be changed in the communication from opposing stakeholders for the issue to be viewed differently?

Wrapping up:

- Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix 2

Interview guide (County Administrative Board of Jönköping)

Background

- Can you tell me about yourself/your organization?
- How long have you been involved in this case and what is your role?

For frames

- Based on your experience/perspective, what is the conflict in Norra Kärr all about?
- Who are the key opposing stakeholders in the conflict? What is their view of the conflict?
- Who is the “we” in these conflicts?
- Who are “they” in these conflicts?
- How do you perceive the motives of opposing stakeholders? What do you think about that?

For relationships and dialogue

- Can you describe the relationship between your organization and the mining company/oppositional stakeholders?
- Has the relationship changed over the years? In what way?
- Can you describe the experience of dialogue and communication with the mining company and oppositional stakeholders?
- Do you feel that your organization has been heard and taken seriously in the dialogues?
- Is the information from the mining company/ oppositional stakeholders understandable?
- Do you feel that you can trust the information from the mining company and oppositional stakeholders?
- Do you think the mining company/oppositional stakeholders are sincere in their communication?

Reframing

- Has the interaction with the mining company/Oppositional stakeholders changed your organization's view on the issue in any way over the years? If yes what, and why?
- What needs to be changed in the communication from the mining company /oppositional stakeholders for the issue to be viewed differently?

Wrapping up:

- Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix 3

AI-disclaimer:

AI (Chat GPT) was used in this thesis for translating some words from Swedish to English and vice versa. It was also used for finding synonyms. Finally, it was used in search for sources for news articles about Norra Kärr and the theory section. TurboScribe was used for transcription of the interviews.

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