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Constructive and destructive dynamics of social transformation

*Edited by Tarla Rai Peterson, Hanna Ljunggren Bergeå,
Andrea M. Feldpausch-Parker and Kaisa Raitio*

Environmental Communication and Community

Constructive and destructive
dynamics of social transformation

**Tarla Rai Peterson,
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Andrea M. Feldpausch-Parker
and Kaisa Raitio**

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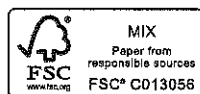
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To Nadarajah Sriskandarajah
Justice crusader
While attentive to power
Maintaining full hope



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2 Reframing conflict in natural resource management

Mutuality, reciprocity and pluralistic agonism as dynamics of community constructivity and destructivity

Lars Hallgren

This chapter explores constructive and destructive dimensions of natural resource management (NRM) conflict and attempts to distinguish them from each other. The point of departure is that NRM conflict is neither solely constructive nor destructive, but involves elements of both.

In order to identify the distinction between constructive and destructive conflict, the chapter critically examines what is generally assumed to be created in a constructive process and destroyed in a destructive process. Based on Mouffe's concept of agonistic pluralism, as a significant adaptation of Habermas's ideas about communicative rationality, I suggest that what is simultaneously destroyed and created in destructive and constructive conflict processes is the actors' intersubjective ability to understand the meaning of the conflict and the differences between agonistic perspectives. To further analyse this process, I consider the face-to-face level of conversation and elaborate on the concepts of commonality, mutuality and reciprocity. It can be concluded that when social interaction generates intersubjective experiences of equivocal reciprocation, opportunities for pluralistic agonism to emerge are reduced, resulting in destructivity. On the other hand, social interaction that generates increased trust in the likelihood of reciprocation increases opportunities for the emergence of pluralistic agonism, resulting in constructivity.

In ordinary English usage, "conflict", as it pertains to NRM, is often perceived to be the opposite of "community". Conflict is often described as the force that destroys community. Thus developing and sustaining a healthy community is assumed to require protection from conflict through the use of conflict management. However, conflict theorists from multiple disciplines have explored ways that conflict can be constitutive and constructive for community. The sociologist George Simmel (1964), for example, argued that conflict is social interaction that paradoxically constitutes society, as well as dissolving society:

If every interaction among men [*sic*] is association, conflict ... must certainly be considered as sociation. And in fact, *dissociating* factors – hate, envy, need, desire – are the causes of conflict. ... Conflict is thus designed

to resolve divergent dualisms; it is a way of achieving some kind of unity, even if it be through the annihilation of one of the conflicting parties.

(Simmel 1964, p. 13)

Conflict is a core concept and an important topic in environmental and NRM literature. A literature search on Web of Science in November 2014 revealed that "environmental conflict" appeared in the heading or abstract of 46 journal articles published in that year. There is, of course, some uncertainty built into the concept and the phenomenon. Conflict as a phenomenon can be viewed from multiple perspectives (Peterson and Feldpausch-Parker 2013). In this chapter, I focus on conflict as: 1) a destructive process that causes society to break down and reduces its ability to think and act jointly, and therefore needs to be prevented and resolved; and 2) a constructive process that is constituting society, and that is necessary for pluralism and creativity, and a productive means of informing a society when it has issues that need to be dealt with. "Conflict ... cannot and should not be eradicated, since the specificity of pluralist democracy is precisely the recognition and the legitimation of conflict" (Mouffe 2013, p. 7). In the NRM literature, this dual nature of conflict is often not considered, and in fact the concept of conflict is often framed in ways that limit attention to its dissociating processes, at the same time descriptions of its associating processes are often overly simplistic. Although Simmel (1964) explicitly describes conflict as a dialectic between sociating–dissociating factors, the NRM literature mainly concentrates on the dissociating factors. This chapter discusses both types of factors, and relies on Simmel's conceptualization of conflict. Rather than using the sociating and dissociating terms proposed by Simmel, however, I use the terms constructive and destructive, in an attempt to juxtapose my argument more directly with contemporary NRM literature generally, and the arguments laid out in this book particularly.

The point of departure for this analysis is that the process of conflict comprises both constructive and destructive processes. It assumes that disagreement should not be considered as inherently destructive, while recognizing that, at most times, something within society will be generating destructivity. This view is raised by Mouffe in her critique of liberal democratic theory:

Contrary to Habermas ... I submit that ... emphasis in the ever present possibility of the friend/enemy distinction and the conflictual nature of politics constitutes the necessary starting point for envisaging the aims of democratic politics. Only by acknowledging "the political" in its antagonistic dimension can we pose the central question for democratic politics.

(Mouffe 2005, p. 14)

The problem is that in previous theoretical and empirical discussions, the phenomena associated with conflict have been attributed constructive and destructive qualities, with little clarification of how the distinction between

constructivity and destructivity should be derived. Moreover, the concept of conflict is often used in the analysis of environmental communication and NRM with an implicit assumption that it is purely destructive. The aim of the present analysis is thus to develop a theoretical understanding of both the distinction and relationships between constructive and destructive aspects of conflict. Simmel (1964, p. 15) writes about the conditions for of this complicated relationship: “there probably exists no social unit in which convergent and divergent currents among its members are not inseparable interwoven”.

Creating a conceptual framework for distinguishing constructivity from destructivity means revisiting the debate between supporters of Mouffe’s emphasis on the never-ending agonistic possibilities of any political system, and a Habermasian (2001) perspective focused on building public consensus via engaging all interested parties in genuinely communicative and deliberative discussions that would occur within the public sphere. Based on their extensive work, I continue by scaling down the conflict situation to face-to-face communication and link my discussion of constructivity–destructivity interactionistic, social constructionist communication theory. I go on to discuss asymmetries in conversation dynamics, which helps formulate a tentative suggestion about the distinction between constructivity and destructivity in environmental conflict.

Constructing and destructing what? Revisiting the Mouffe–Habermas debate

The words constructive and destructive have a common etymology in “structure”, from the Latin *struere*; to pile or heap up. Constructive is an adjective describing that something is built or put together, in the original meaning something concrete, e.g. a wall. The adjective destructive (destroy) comes from the Latin *destruere*; to tear down. Thus in a constructive conflict, it should be possible to identify the “structure” that has been constructed and in a destructive conflict it should be possible to identify the structure that has been destroyed. It may help in making a distinction between constructive and destructive aspects of NRM conflicts if we can clarify *what* is constructed and destroyed. Often this *what*, the structure built/destroyed in the process of the conflict, is not explained when talking about constructivity and destructivity. Instead, “constructive” is used to describe a conflict that is considered to be developing in a generally “good” direction and “destructive” is used to describe a conflict considered to be developing in a generally “bad” direction.

For making a meaningful distinction between constructivity and destructivity, the same “thing”, i.e. a particular structure, which is constructed in a constructive conflict should be destroyed in a destructive conflict. Constructivity and destructivity should be considered not only as a pair of related concepts, but also as social processes that are dialectically related: What is constructed in the constructive phase is the same as that which is destroyed in the destructive phase.

Conflicts are sometimes described as “productive”, where productive is used synonymously with constructive. This creates a need for specification; *what* is the conflict producing? In this study, “constructive” is preferred over “productive”, since productive can easily be associated with economic goals, e.g. a conflict could be considered “productive” if resulting in “Pareto-optimal distribution”, or if alternative costs and transaction costs are lower than the benefit or if the situation contributes to economic growth. This is not the direction to take when searching for a distinction between constructivity and destructivity in conflicts.

Case study descriptions of NRM conflicts commonly describe the conflict as a disagreement or interest divergence on one hand, and implicitly or explicitly as destructive on the other hand (e.g. Silva-Macher and Farrell 2014; Martin *et al.* 2014; Keir and Ali 2014). This would make “consensus” or “agreement” the structure constructed/destroyed in conflict, with the result that conflicts could not be considered constructive at all. One critic of this view is Mouffe (2013), who claims that society “requires a debate about possible alternatives”. The present analysis investigates whether her terminology could contribute to identification of what is constructed/destroyed. Mouffe (2013, p. 6) argues that conflict is necessary, e.g. for the constitution of social identities:

the fundamental question is not how to arrive at a consensus reached without exclusion, because this would require the construction of an us that would not have a corresponding them ... the very condition for the constitution of us is the demarcation of a “them”.

Mouffe (2005) emphasizes that society is always facing the possibility of conflict, and that conflict can take the form of antagonism, hostility between groups, but also “agonism”. Agonism is when actors challenge others’ ideas, not their legitimacy to represent these ideas in a debate. The distinction Mouffe makes between antagonistic relations between actors in a conflict and agonistic relations concerns the extent to which actors involved in conflict see and respond to each other as legitimate.

Mouffe’s purpose with this distinction is different than that in the present study; her intention is to emphasize the importance of understanding society as political and to identify opportunities for radical, pluralistic democracy. Her ultimate objective, and that of Habermas (2001), is a normative discussion about how to organize decision-making in society. The political philosophy of Mouffe does not obviously lend itself to the identification of what is constructed/destroyed in a conflict process. However, we will read Mouffe with the purpose to analytically separate constructivity and destructivity in conflict, and as the first step to identify what it is that is constructed respective to what is destructed.

Antagonism can take many forms and it is illusory to believe that they could ever be eradicated. This is why it is important to allow them an

agonistic form of expression through the pluralist democratic system.... A democratic society requires a debate about possible alternatives and it must provide political forms of collective identification around clearly differentiated democratic positions.

(Mouffe 2005, pp. 30–31)

[In agonism] ... others are not seen as enemies to be destroyed, but as adversaries whose ideas might be fought, even fiercely, but whose right to defend those ideas is not to be questioned.

(Mouffe 2013, p. 7)

However, Mouffe also stresses the difference between her view on agonism and the proposers of normative dialogue, who typically mean that if disagreeing actors talk with each other in a respectful way, they might together find new solutions to the problem that caused the conflict. This is not what Mouffe seeks. Rather, she claims that, “in an agonistic politics, however, the antagonistic dimension is always present, since what is at stake is the struggle between opposing hegemonic projects which can never be reconciled rationally, one of them needing to be defeated” (Mouffe 2013, p. 9). Her point here is that the always pre-existing hegemonic relations preclude any democratic politics without antagonism.

Mouffe criticizes neo-liberal political philosophy for making universal consensus the goal of politics, and denying the political aspect of politics. However, she confirms that consensus on procedural issues is necessary for pluralistic agonism to arise. Moreover, she stresses that the aim of democracy is not to overcome political distance between groups and sub-communities or to generate integration between segregated groups through unification. Politics, according to Mouffe, should be pluralistic, which includes separation into “us” and “them”: “The crucial issue then is to establish this us/them distinction, which is constitutive of politics, in a way that is compatible with the recognition of pluralism” (Mouffe 2013, p. 7).

What is not quite as clear when reading Mouffe from the perspective of distinguishing between constructivity and destructivity is to what extent a community understanding of the difference between contested perspectives is necessary for pluralism. Does “plural” imply that actors involved in conflict are aware of the meaning of the different perspectives? Or would a situation where people who perceive a “we–them” identity, but have no idea about the ideological difference between “them” and “us”, equally qualify as “plural”? In the present analysis, I adopted the following standpoint: *to be able to talk about pluralism in a conflict situation, it is necessary for the agonism (argument, debate, dialogue) to result in the actors involved understanding the difference between perspectives.* If confusion and/or misunderstanding about the difference between perspectives increase with agonism, or if what actors know about other actors’ propositions is only that they are made by actors different from themselves, but not how they were made, then plurality cannot be claimed to

exist. For plurality, it must be possible for actors to understand the range of alternatives. When the relationship between two (or more) opinions is unclear and there is no joint, legitimate method for working that clarifies the difference, then agonism will evolve into antagonism and adversaries will become enemies. This transition should be called destructive.

At this stage of the analysis it is necessary to link Mouffe’s approach with Habermas’s theory of communicative action, despite these authors having come to quite different conclusions in their work. Mouffe in fact explicitly questions whether there is any opportunity for communicative rationality. However, I believe that communicative rationality is a necessary complement to Mouffe’s distinction between agonistic pluralism and antagonism if we are to distinguish between constructive and destructive conflict.

Communicative rationality takes place, according to Habermas (2001, p. 88), in a communicative situation where: i) all claims of validity are allowed to affect discourse until there is consensus about the invalidity of the claim; ii) all claims of validity are evaluated as regards the extent to which the claim is intelligible, true, legitimate and sincere; iii) all actors can raise claims of validity, and iv) all actors can question validity. Mouffe (2013, p. 7) writes that: “Adversaries fight against each other because they want their interpretations ... to become hegemonic, but they do not put into question the legitimacy of their opponent’s right to fight for the victory for their position”.

What Mouffe describes seems undeniably to be a situation characterized by communicative rationality: actors arguing their respective contrary interpretations, thus making validity claims, and raising questions about validity, but not questioning the right of their opponent to claim validity. This can therefore be interpreted not as a procedure for generating universal consensus, but as a procedure for generating pluralism, thus developing a shared understanding by actors of the difference in ontology and epistemology.

Following this line of thinking, communicative rationality does not result in general consensus about ontology, epistemology, values, ethics, or joint action. Instead, communicative rationality continuously works to establish local, temporary and situated consensus about: i) meta-communicative procedure, i.e. conditions for communicating about the disagreement; ii) the meaning of the concepts used; and iii) the meaning of the difference in perspective and premises of the adversaries. Mouffe (2005, p. 37) confirms that pluralistic agonism is dependent on consensus in meta-communicative questions: “Consensus is no doubt necessary, but it must be accompanied by dissent. Consensus is needed on the institutions constitutive of democracy”.

This re-reading of Mouffe and Habermas provides a temporary answer as to *what* is constructed and destroyed in conflict processes, namely the ability to agonize. The ability to agonize should not be considered an individual capacity, but the capacity of a social practice; an intersubjective, temporary and situated capacity that is reconstructed when experienced.

With this view, what is constructed in a constructive conflict is a social practice to investigate the conflict, the foundation and conditions for the

antagonism, and the differences in perspectives. What is destroyed in a destructive conflict is the disagreeing actors' joint ability to investigate the conflict, its foundations and conditions, and differences in perspectives. This ability is intersubjective, shared and co-constructed; it is an emergent property of the social interaction in the conflict, not a static property of the individuals involved or a property of the context of the conflict or disagreement as such.

Illustration of the dynamics of constructivity and destructivity in NRM conflict

Before continuing this conceptual and theoretical investigation of constructivity and destructivity in NRM conflicts, the theory can be illustrated with a case study. Note that this does not purport to be a complete, validated analysis of the case, but rather an illustration of the theory discussed here. The case is described in detail in Hallgren (2003).

The small river Emån in south-east Sweden regularly floods the surrounding landscape, occasionally causing damage to societal infrastructure, and often causing crop damage and costs for farmers. During the 1990s, farmers, supported by a parliamentary decision in 1974 on meeting flood protection costs in the area, applied for permission to improve drainage. The proposal encountered resistance from nature conservation authorities and organizations. In the ensuing enquiry and decision-making process, which lasted more than ten years, both sides in the conflict expressed and responded to various arguments in formal texts, debate articles, and public meetings. Farmers argued that the proposed drainage project was necessary for their economic survival and for the development of the area, and would not cause any environmental problems. Nature conservation organizations argued that the proposed drainage would cause serious, multiple environmental degradation and that farm finances and rural development are not dependent on flood protection, as agriculture has been practiced in the area for hundreds of years without these measures. In research interviews, both parties argued that there was no reason for conflict, that no goal interference existed, and that the other party had dark, hidden motives for its action. Each side claimed that the other side was not sincere and/or was deliberately hiding the truth, and that its actions were based on a desire to harm them rather than defending the interests they publicly claimed to represent. One farmer said repeatedly in an interview that "one can hardly believe it's true, how I've been treated" and claimed that civil servants at the county administrative board, as well as the representatives of nature conservation organizations arguing in the case, were "jealous" of farmers. The same farmer stated in a formal letter to the authorities that some of the objections received were written by individuals running a "vendetta" against farmers and with a hatred of farmers as individuals. In interviews, civil servants and representatives of nature conservation organizations claimed that the farmers involved had based their financial plans on

unrealistic expectations on farm output, making them recklessly commit to the drainage case, regardless of the consequences. They also claimed that some of the farmers belonged to a certain landlord culture whereby they believed they did not have to care about public interests and decisions by authorities. One member of a nature conservation organization asked the researcher what other people had been interviewed and, when the name of one of the farmers was mentioned, asked "was that possible" (to talk with him).

The disagreement about drainage in Emån had both constructive and destructive aspects, but over time destructivity dominated; the involved actors' shared ability to investigate the conditions and consequences of the disagreement were successively reduced when actors debated the issue with each other. The interviews revealed that when actors had experienced the communication process, they became increasingly convinced that the other party had hidden motives, and speculation about these motives became increasingly advanced. The interviews and scrutiny of the letters exchanged also revealed that actors' faith in, and expectation of, being understood and able to understand was reduced. Communication was increasingly less considered to be a functional means of exercising influence in the issue, and various other forms of exercise of power, such as delegitimizing and excluding the antagonist, were applied. Farmers sometimes reported public officers at the county administrative board to the constitutional court for abuse of power, and to the environmental court for environmental crimes. Farmers also invited politicians to their farms during flooding and told their version of the story. When one Member of Parliament then criticized the authority in the media for bad management procedures, the chief executive of the authority claimed that that criticism was "the lowest low water mark during my 30 years in Swedish politics". In the analysis below, I show that a lot of discursive openings, i.e. opportunities to investigate important issues in society, were made in this case, but they tended not to remain open, but closed due to inability to exploit them. This is what is meant by destructive conflict.

A particular issue in the conflict about drainage in Emån concerned the validity of a research report in which a biologist argued that the population of catfish (*Silurus glanis*) in the river had decreased as a consequence of an earlier drainage project in another part of the same river, and that further drainage should be avoided and regarded as a threat to the survival of the endangered catfish population. That report was based on the statistical analysis of a catch and re-catch sample before and after the drainage project. The report was criticized and discussed in a public exchange of letters (circulated to more than 20 organizations, including the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) and the Ministry for the Environment). The farmers claimed that since the catch and re-catch monitoring had been conducted at different times in the years before and after the drainage project, they were not directly comparable and thus the report was unable to draw valid conclusions about population changes. This exchange involved an argument on differences in views on statistical analysis between farmers and biologists. To some extent

this met the criterion defined for constructive conflict in this chapter, as it involved arguments about the statistical theories and procedures on which valid statements about reasons for catfish population changes should be based and how these changes should be evaluated. This procedure could result in farmers and biologists realizing why they disagree; e.g. because of thinking differently about statistical theory, or making these different assumptions about society. However, other arguments also appeared. One farmer claimed that the researchers had written a sloppy, unscientific report, that their research methodology was faulty and that funding bodies should support other researchers instead. One of the biologists replied that: "since you are a technician and not a biologist, I need to point out that biology does not follow mechanistic rules ... in biological issues, it is the freshwater laboratory which has the knowledge and competence". The researcher continued: "with this we consider the personal debate with you closed, and will continue with more constructive work". We will return to this quote later, but note that in this very sentence, the terminology used in this chapter paradoxically backfires; when the investigative dialogue is classified as destructive (or at least less constructive), then use of the concept "constructive" contributes to destructivity.

What is destructive in this situation is not that the actors disagreed about the size and development of the catfish population or about research methods, but that their joint ability to investigate important differences in ontology, epistemology and ideology, which was the foundation for the disagreement, was successively reduced. For the actors in this conflict, the intentions behind others' actions became increasingly confused and more difficult to interpret, and they increasingly tended to explain the behaviour of the other as being based on illegitimate drivers, rather than legitimate argumentation for a position based in ontological and epistemological assumptions they themselves disagreed about. The conflict about draining the river Emån would have been constructive if the ability to investigate the foundations of conflict could have been reconstructed. As I see it, both constructivity and destructivity are always situated and always changing. In every moment the process can turn around and constructivity can transform into destructivity and vice versa. The ability for joint investigation of conditions and consequences of disagreement is the temporary, dynamic result of the last turns in the interaction between actors in the conflict, and how they choose to respond to each other's previous actions. In the last example above, the researcher responded to the farmer's criticism of the statistical method used for drawing conclusions, in a question that engaged both of them, through writing that the personal debate was finished and that the researcher would now return to more constructive activities. This can be interpreted as: i) a suggestion of a discursive closure; let's end this investigation of our disagreement, and ii) a classification of the exchange so far as non-constructive. However, the exchange only becomes destructive with the response confirming the proposed discursive closure that the investigation of disagreement is ending. From the perspective proposed in

this chapter, it is the intersubjective, dynamic consequence of actions that are constructive or destructive, not action in itself. It is the ability to jointly investigate the conditions and consequences that are constructed/destroyed in every communicative action in relation to all other previous actions and all other anticipated future actions.

Constructivity and destructivity as a dynamic response to mutuality and reciprocity

In this section, terminology developed for investigating face-to-face interaction is used in order to understand the dynamic of constructivity and destructivity in NRM conflicts. Since the theory of communicative action was first introduced, the concrete face-to-face situation has to some extent been the model for understanding the distinction between constructive and destructive aspects of conflict.

Three concepts: commonality, mutuality and reciprocity, frequently are used to describe different levels of sharedness and symmetry/asymmetry in conversations (Grauman 1995; Linell 2010). The basis of the social constructionist perspective on conversation is that actions, such as gestures, utterances, etc. are assumed to be both dependent on the context of the conversation and creators of the context of the conversation in a dialectical way.

Commonality refers to assumptions about the world, self and other, that conversationalists share; knowledge, language, identity. Part of what the conversationalists share has been generated during the conversation. Mutuality refers to the assumptions the conversationalists make about what they have in common and to what degree; assumptions about what others know/assume, and assumptions about what others assume I know/assume. Reciprocity refers to shared assumptions about the interplay itself and how to reciprocate; assumptions about being involved in an interplay where one is expected to respond to the other, and the other is expected to respond back. Furthermore, when involved in an interplay, we expect that the other expects us to respond to their gesture, e.g. if my neighbour says good morning, I expect s/he will expect me to respond. That this is what we expect is evident when we consider the embarrassment we experience if we recognize too late that we did not respond to our neighbour's greetings (Asplund 1987). If this happens, the next time we meet we often become involved in complicated, meta-communicative explanations; "You know, I did not see you, and then when I saw you, you had turned around and that truck was hooting so you did not hear when I shouted".

For example, consider two actors, A and B, who have different perspectives on an issue about a resource R, about which both are concerned. A and B have different and contested interests in that if A employs means in order to achieve his/her interest, B's opportunity to realize his/her own interest will be reduced, and vice versa. A and B also disagree about the status of R, and about whether A's or B's interest should be prioritized. A and B have a

conflict that can develop in a constructive or destructive direction. Thus their joint, co-constructed, intersubjective ability to investigate the meaning of the conflict and its premises can be constructed or destroyed. The point of departure in this chapter is that before A and B initiate their conversation about R, they disagree about R, so only some of their assumptions about R are shared (commonality). Before the conversation, they do not necessarily know what assumptions are common and what assumptions they disagree about. Simultaneously, before the conversation, both parties assume they have enough in common to make conversation possible and meaningful (mutuality), that they can expect some, or even a certain kind of, reciprocation from the other, and that they themselves will be able to reciprocate (in approximately the way they assume the other will expect; reciprocity). These are the basic assumptions to be made if communication is to be initiated at all; a minimum of reciprocal assumptions about mutuality and reciprocity. When communicating, A and B will subsequently investigate their intersubjective commonality. In this case, A and B have much disagreement about R, meaning commonality about R is partly lacking. Simultaneously, A and B are communal in that they more or less share a language for talking about their disagreement of R. This communality gradually grows when they talk about disagreeing about R, thereby creating experiences of understanding and misunderstanding each other. When A and B talk about R, they experience talking and thus they re-evaluate the meaning of the turns they have pursued in relation to the anticipated response and the actual response. Their continued talking will be based on their experiences of talking. Each turn will constitute the interpretive context of the next turn, in a constantly re-constructing process.

When A and B start talking with each other, they do this based on assumptions about what is mutually known, what both of them know. This may be an assumption about sharing concepts that could be used for representing certain perspectives on R, concepts for representing A and B, and concepts representing assumptions about a shared or divergent view on R. When A and B experience talking with each other about R, their assumptions about what is mutually known will change. Since A and B disagree about R, they will gradually discover during their communication that what they both assumed to be mutually known about the issues is something they disagree about. Based on their experience of this communication, they will also develop new assumptions about a mutual view on the disagreement.

When A and B initiate their conversation, they do so on the basis of an assumption that they know when and how they should reciprocate the other's actions, that the other knows when and how s/he should respond to them, and that the other has certain expectations about when and how they should respond. When they have experiences of talking about R and their disagreement about R, their assumptions about how reciprocation takes place in this particular, local conversation gradually change.

There is thus a dynamic and dialectic relation between commonality, mutuality, and reciprocity. If there are great asymmetries in commonality (i.e.

disagreement), this may (but does not have to) generate asymmetries in mutuality, which may then generate asymmetries in reciprocity, and vice versa. Asymmetries in commonality and mutuality can thus generate from asymmetries in reciprocity. This dynamic is connected to constructivity and destructivity, since it decides how the intersubjective ability to investigate the disagreement will be changed in every interactive turn (three or more connected actions; question-answer-response to answer, statement-counterstatement-response to counterstatement, etc.). With this view, the ability to investigate disagreement is (re)constructed or deconstructed in every turn in the interaction, meaning that constructivity and destructivity are situated, local and continuously changing, or reproduced.

I argue in earlier work (Hallgren 2003, Hallgren and Ljung 2005) for a slightly different, but related, definition of destructive aspects of conflict: destructivity is a social interaction during which the interactants' trust in the interaction is decreasing. "Trust in interaction" means that actors assume that they know how they should act in the interaction and what they can expect from the interaction. When actors' trust in interaction reciprocity is decreasing, i.e. when actors doubt they know how to master the interaction situation and subsequently doubt they can influence it through communication, the intersubjective ability to investigate the disagreement declines, resulting in destructivity.

This way of thinking directs attention towards reciprocity in particular. Assumptions about adequate reciprocation are central for a social interaction to be able to handle asymmetries in commonality and mutuality, and are thus the core of constructivity in disagreement. When actors experience equivocal and paradoxical responses, and uncertainty about reciprocation is co-constructed, the communicative tools for investigating the agonism become weaker and destructivity emerges; actors become worse at detecting and repairing misinterpretations, and the co-acting community becomes less tolerant of disagreement. Actors tend to portray their opponents as enemies that should be restricted, rather than as legitimate proponents for their interpretation. The situation then takes the form of antagonism rather than agonism, resulting in reduced plurality.

At the level of face-to-face interaction, we have seen that the ability to investigate conflict can be reduced (destructivity) if there is uncertainty about reciprocation. In this, the micro and macro theories reviewed here intersect. Reciprocation on the micro level is what "institutions constitutive for democracy" is on the macro level. Mouffe (2005, p. 37) writes that "Consensus is needed on the institutions constitutive of democracy". Certainty about reciprocation at the speech act level corresponds to consensus on the institutions constitutive for democracy on the macro level. A precondition for pluralism, and for constructive conflict, is all parties believing that they know how to respond and what (kind of) responses to expect in a communicative encounter, and knowing that they agree with their fellow citizens on the function of democratic institutions, even when they disagree

about the ontology and epistemology of the issues being discussed. Consensus on institutions for democracy and symmetry in reciprocity is actually the same, but on different scales; both are about shared assumptions/agreements about the preconditions for reciprocity. The agonistic interplay presupposes that actors acknowledge their adversaries' right to work passionately for their interpretation of the situation to be hegemonic. For actors to give this legitimacy to each other, they must themselves believe they can manage the interaction. If they do, there are opportunities for opposing groups to develop their understanding of the meaning and premises of the conflict, the competing political alternatives then become clear, and agonistic pluralism is realized.

Conclusions

This chapter has identified and developed a number of approaches that may be used for distinguishing constructive and destructive processes in NRM, and suggested how these concepts and the phenomena they represent relate to each other dynamically and dialectically. The perspective advocated here provides immediately practical suggestions for how both environmental communication researchers and natural resource managers could understand and work with both constructivity and destructivity on the basis that *something* is both constructed and destroyed in all conflict processes, and that this *something* is an intersubjective ability to investigate the meaning of the conflict, an ability that is local, situated and temporal, and constantly re-negotiated through the communication processes. Simply recognizing the ordinariness of this process can enable a more productive attitude toward conflict in general. The chapter has also shown that both coherent and paradoxical experiences of reciprocity are important drivers in the emergence of community constructivity and destructivity. These experiences affect constructivity and destructivity in both micro level, face-to-face situations of conflict and macro level conflicts with more complex social and political situations, representation, and communication mediated in public forums.

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