

Results of the Nordic Hunting in Society Symposium

HANS PETER HANSEN, M. NILS PETERSON, AND
TARLA R. PETERSON

Unit for Environmental Communication, Department of Urban and Rural
Development, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Uppsala, Sweden

Representatives of the major Nordic hunter's associations (i.e., Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden) met in February 2010 to identify key challenges for the future of hunting and develop a vision for how hunting would fit within society in the future. Most participants (7) represented national level hunters associations, but agricultural landowners associations (4), national wildlife management agencies (2), and researchers (5) were represented as well. We facilitated the symposium using the Critical Utopian Action Research approach and Future Creation Workshop model (Nielsen & Nielsen, 2006). Participants were asked to explore concerns and visions in the intersection of hunting and society, and propose strategies for achieving their visions. The process included plenary brainstorming, prioritization of keywords, thematic synthesis of keywords, and elaboration of themes in small groups.

Participants identified five main themes among their concerns: negative public perceptions of hunting, conflicts between user groups, poor match between governance scale and management decisions, internal degradation of the hunting ethic, and problems recruiting new hunters. The group discussions focused on changing perceptions of the appropriate human role within ecosystems and wildlife management, on the role of hunting in rural socioeconomic development, on how divergent values impacted people's acceptance of hunting, and on the democratic deficit in decisions made at national and European Union (EU) levels. The discussions of hunting ethics examined both negative changes in ethics among hunters and how these changes might create a backlash against hunting among the non-hunting public and the discussions addressing recruitment of new hunters identified challenges such as low levels of practical knowledge about hunting, economic constraints, people's minimal contact with nature, and presentation of hunting in the media.

Participants identified three main themes among their utopian visions: no bad press, opportunities for anyone to hunt, and better decision-making. The discussions of these themes focused on need for critical media as well as the need for more transparency within the hunting community and the need for the hunting community to become more proactive in forming new alliances. Also, a better understanding of the internal norms and behaviors of hunters, and society's perspectives regarding the relationship between humans and animals was encouraged. The discussions on better hunting opportunities for everyone focused on improving relations between hunters and landowners, the need for developing better ways to distribute game meat, encouraging diversity among hunters, preventing

Address correspondence to Hans Peter Hansen, Unit for Environmental Communication, Department of Urban and Rural Development, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, P.O. Box 7012, 750 07 Uppsala, Sweden. E-mail: Hans.Hansen@sol.slu.se

hunting from becoming an exclusionary activity, and introducing hunting culture in primary schools. The discussions on decision-making offered five suggestions: including local knowledge in decision-making processes, clarifying distinctions between knowledge and values, improving legitimacy by reducing distance between decision-makers and those affected by decisions, increasing the role of socioeconomic and sociocultural knowledge in decision-making, and matching the scale of decisions to the scale of management.

Symposium results suggest Nordic wildlife management stakeholders should emphasize social science and cross-disciplinarity more, and encourage direct involvement of affected people in future research. Four general research topics were highlighted: hunter identity and how it compares to public perceptions of hunters, internal norms of hunters, socioeconomic contributions of hunting to rural development and governance, and communication and public participation.

The results from the symposium reflect three central dilemmas of modern society: relationships between humans and nature, lack of political legitimacy, and the role of various types of knowledge and rationalities. Evolving forms of facilitated systems modeling and structured decision-making may provide tools to address these needs.

Reference

- Nielsen, K., & Nielsen, B. (2006). Methodologies in action research—Action research and critical theory. In K. Nielsen & L. Svensson (Eds.), *Action research and interactive research* (pp. 65–87). Maarstricht, The Netherlands and Denmark: Shaker Publishing.