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NATURE AND NATURE VALUES IN ORGANIC AGRICULTURE.
AN ANALYSIS OF CONTESTED CONCEPTS AND VALUES
AMONG DIFFERENT ACTORS IN ORGANIC FARMING

(Accepted in revised form June 20, 2005)

ABSTRACT. The relationship between agriculture and nature is a central issue in the current agricultural debate. Organic Farming has ambitions and a special potential in relation to nature. Consideration for nature is part of the guiding principals of organic farming and many organic farmers are committed to protecting natural qualities. However, the issue of nature, landscape, and land use is not straightforward. Nature is an ambiguous concept that involves multiple interests and actors reaching far beyond farmers. The Danish research project *Nature Quality in Organic Farming* has investigated the relationship between nature and organic farming. This article will focus on an expert workshop held in connection with the project that investigates the way different actors conceptualize nature. Farmers, scientists, and non-governmental organizations came together to discuss their experiences of nature and expectations of organic agriculture. From this interaction, it was clear that nature is a contested notion. Different understandings of nature exist within the three groups and there is disagreement as to whether emphasis should be given to biological qualities, production values, or experiential and aesthetic perspectives. This complexity provides a challenge to organic farming as well as to the implementation of nature considerations in general. It illustrates an underlying battle for the right to define nature and nature quality and essentially decide what organic farmers should work towards. We argue that successful implementation requires organic farmers to carefully consider what expectations they wish to meet. Optimally it is dependent on a dialog between stakeholder interest groups that allows for multivocality and pluralism.

KEY WORDS: actors, discourse, implementation, multivocality, nature, nature quality, organic farming, values

1. INTRODUCTION

Farming in Europe is no longer only a question of producing food and improving primary production. Words like multi-functionality and rural development have entered the debate, and the agricultural production is expected to supply a number of additional environmental and social services to the surrounding communities by their land use strategies. This stand-point is supported in the European Union's recent agricultural reform by

disengaging the agricultural subsidies from production (European Commission, 2005). This general tendency is mirrored in developments occurring in Denmark. Society is putting increased demands on the agricultural community. Both the political establishment and the consumers expect farmers to contribute to a sustainable and environmentally sound production (Jensen et al., 2001). In this context, one of the issues at stake is how precisely can we take care of nature and landscape values in future agricultural development.

In organic agriculture, nature and landscape values hold a special position and potential. Firstly organic production does not utilize pesticides and artificial fertilizers well documented for their serious environmental consequences. In addition, its commitment to having livestock graze outdoors in itself provides a good starting point for a more sustainable management of nature and landscapes. Apart from this, the question of nature protection is part of the central principles in the organic farming associations. Both IFOAM and the national Danish Organic Farming Association have specifically formulated considerations for nature values as part of their guiding principals (Økologisk Landsforening, 2002; IFOAM, 2005).

However, the implementation of nature considerations in organic farming raises a number of questions. It requires reflection on what one incorporates in the concept of nature and what not, and how to set valuable nature apart from the not valuable. At present, the objectives have a very general character (Jessel, 2001; Højring et al., 2004), and need to be concretized to be usable in practical management.

Although farmers play a key role in the management of nature and landscape, the interest in our common nature reaches far beyond them. In Europe, only a small percentage of the population is employed in farming, while all people have concerns about the state of the environment and landscape around them. As such, when we talk about nature and landscape issues, it inherently involves a multiplicity of interests and actors from many parts of society (Wilson, 2001; Tybirk et al., 2004). We know that the notion of nature is complex and ambiguous, and can have very different meaning to different actors (Milton, 2002; Siipi, 2004; Tybirk et al., 2004). Overall, there is an awakening awareness that agricultural production takes place in a cultural and social context, and that the relationship, interaction, and dialog with actors outside of the agricultural sector is of importance and an influence in the development of agriculture. However, we are still behind on how we might balance these interests into workable systems where all parties can reach a reasonable understanding.

In realizing this, we need a deeper understanding and a concrete empirical knowledge of how different actors (farming as well as non-farming) define and understand the notions of nature and nature quality. Do

farmers' understandings correspond with those of non-farming actors, or do they hold different interests in and conceptions of nature? Unless organic farmers know what other stakeholders in this field find valuable, it is impossible for them to meet expectations. The question is central, because it touches on the issue of ownership. If there are multiple understandings of nature, who is then to give a definition of nature and nature quality and decide what farmers should strive for in their daily management and decision-making on the farms? Will some perspectives be dominant or can multiple definitions and understandings be accommodated in implementation? These are the central problems we will address in this paper.

On the basis of ethnographic material generated during the interdisciplinary research project *Nature Quality in Organic Farming*, focusing in depth on an expert workshop held at the Danish Institute for Agricultural Sciences in September 2004, we will investigate how different actors understand the concept of nature and what they identify as qualities in nature. The article aims to explore how the understanding of nature and its qualities is tied to personal experiences and backgrounds as well as professional interests. We argue that the debate can be viewed as a discourse containing different competing stories and themes of nature and that this complexity provides a substantial challenge at the level of implementation and for the future development of this aspect within organic agriculture.

2. METHOD

The project *Nature Quality in Organic Farming*, financed by the Danish Research Centre for Organic Farming (DARCOF), aims to investigate nature quality on organic farms and looks at farmers' possibilities for supporting and attending to nature conservation. This interdisciplinary project focuses on various aspects of nature quality: biological, geographical, and sociological aspects are covered, and the project attempts to integrate these perspectives and combine knowledge on the physical structural landscape, with biological information and knowledge of the farmer's perceptions and experiences of nature (DARCOF, 2005).

The expert workshop discussed in this paper is part of a work area, that focuses on the social aspects and takes a conceptual and communicative approach to the topic. Both the organic farmers' conceptions of nature as well as the communication between farmers and natural scientists have been examined. Prior to the workshop, qualitative interviews with 10 organic farmers had been carried out. These interviews focused on the farmer's perception of nature and the way he or she managed the natural surroundings. The farmers were questioned on their interest in nature and what

they found valuable (Hansen et al., 2004a; Højring et al., 2004). The researchers' perceptions were challenged prior to the workshop in a cross cutting workshop held internally within the research project (Hansen et al., 2004b). However, the broad knowledge we had gained on farmers and scientists through these activities needed to be expanded to include other actors that take part in the debate. We therefore invited different actors with an interest in nature and organic agriculture to discuss the possibilities of organic farming's contribution to developing and improving nature and landscape qualities in Denmark.

It was our belief that in order to elucidate the differences in understandings and interests, a communication across actors and interest groups needed to be established. In a dialogue, the differences in viewpoints were likely to surface and become clear. The workshop was therefore organized as a focus group, by which it is possible to highlight agreements and disagreements on an issue within a group as well as explore how participants construct and reconstruct their viewpoints when challenged by others (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). This communication could provide a chance to exchange motives, values, and interests and give the participants an opportunity to develop a mutual understanding and respect for the different views (Højring and Noe, 2004).

Eleven people participated in the workshop. Four representatives from organic farmers and the Danish Organic Farming Association, four researchers working with organic farming and nature, and three representatives from two NGOs: *The Danish Outdoor Council* (Friluftsrådet) and *The Free Agents* (Idéværkstedet De Frie Fugle). *The Danish Outdoor Council* is an umbrella organization covering most Danish organizations working within outdoor recreation and nature protection. *The Free agents* is an interdisciplinary advisory and information center working with conventional and organic agriculture, environmental issues, and outdoor life.

The participants discussed the concept of nature and their experiences in nature. They exchanged perceptions of positive nature experiences and valuable nature qualities. Expectations of organic farming's contribution to the creation of nature qualities were debated, and the group tried to identify indicators for measuring whether organic farming could achieve these goals. The participants were encouraged to draw on both their personal experiences and preferences as well as on the interests of the organization and professions that they represented. The intension was to start a self-reflective process in the group that would help voice different understandings and viewpoints on the concepts instead of aiming for the group to come to agreement.

The analysis of this empirical material forms the basis of the following categorization of nature conceptions among the participants. The results are

viewed against the results from the interviews and from the researchers' workshop.

3. CONCEPTIONS OF NATURE

During the workshop, the group constantly circled around the definition of nature and it soon became obvious that the participants spoke of very different things when they spoke of nature. Therefore, when we refer to nature in the following, we do not refer to any specific definition of the concept, but rather to different conceptualizations introduced into the discourse by the participants. We have examined and unraveled the stories in the dialogue and identified three key themes or ways of speaking of nature that were repeated in the otherwise complex and detailed personal accounts:

- Nature as inherent biological value
- Nature as a partner in organic production
- Nature as space for activity and experience

3.1. *Nature as Inherent Biological Value*

The theme of nature as inherent biological value is closely linked to a scientific understanding of nature. Nature is defined as the opposite of culture – that is – nature is seen as those parts of the world that have not been touched or influenced by humans. Nature is wild and pristine, and, therefore, the term nature is mostly applied to uncultivated areas or to areas with relatively limited human influence. Nature is primarily understood as biotopes and the species that inhabit these biotopes.

Under this conception, protection becomes a preferred approach to safeguard nature quality, particularly the protection of rare leftovers of untouched ecosystems – the so-called exclusive nature. The distinction between exclusive high quality nature and more common and widespread low quality nature was expressed repeatedly. Butterflies, bellflowers, and plants with olive green foliage were mentioned as examples of good nature, whereas nettles and other tall leafy plants are examples of unwanted nature. Good nature is unpolluted, that is, it is free of pesticides and low on nutrients. Nettles indicate a high nutritional level and are, therefore, not desirable. Another requirement of good nature is authenticity.

Biologist: “The most important thing to me is authenticity. A dandelion that comes through the asphalt, it is authentic, whereas if you try to create nature by sowing out lots of wild plants, then it is not nature to me, it is unauthentic.”¹

¹ All quotations have been translated from Danish into English by the authors.

Nature should neither be constructed nor planned. The notion of authenticity means that native plants and species are considered particularly exclusive, whereas introduced planted plants are not desirable.

The issues of authenticity and pollution introduce the underlying values in this theme, which we will elaborate in the discussion on perceived qualities in nature. Overall, nature is seen to have inherent and imperative value.

3.2. *Nature as a Partner in Organic Production*

The theme of nature as a partner was dominant in the farmers' stories. It builds on a close relationship between nature and agricultural production. In this understanding, the definition of nature is broad; it is not only concerned with biotopes and species. To farmers, nature is uncultivated as well as cultivated land. They mentioned the colors of their fields, their grazing animals, their crops, and the hedgerows they have planted. Nature, in these stories, expresses itself in all of the landscapes. It is the force that makes crops flourish and animals grow, that makes farming possible. Farmers were not concerned with the notion of non-human interference. Nature is cultivated and controlled, as well as wild and pristine.

Farmer: "It gives us an incredible experience at home to go for walks in the forest, the fields, the hills. It is quiet. There is variation. We go through hills, we see some sheep, we go through a forest, we come out and we see heifers, we walk through a field full of carrots. We experience a lot of different things, we see lots of different things and we go for that walk throughout the year."

This notion of nature as a partner is a crucial aspect of farmers' relation with nature. From this point of view, nature is seen and accepted as essential to organic farming. There is a conception of a synergy effect between improved conditions for nature and agricultural surplus. Species diversity is seen as a security, because it is a basic resource and a genetic security net for farming and the environment. Some organic dairy producers sow specific herbs in their grass fields. These herbs are expected to contribute positively to the cattle's health and well-being, increasing welfare and even yields. Other farmers put starling nest boxes in the fields, because the starlings help control leatherjackets in the crops. It is an idea of nature as beneficial and nature as collaborator.

Participant from organic farming: "As organic farmers we are to a larger extent than the conventional farmers dependent on a positive collaboration with nature and that we attempt to benefit all we can from this collaboration with nature. Nature in the cultivated land is an area we would like to develop. How can we develop and strengthen the interaction that takes place here?"

In this way, nature in the farmers' understandings is also a matter of force and function. This is opposed to the biological theme where emphasis is primarily on nature as structure and form.

3.3. *Nature as Space for Activity and Experience*

In the third theme, nature is seen as a space for human experiences and activities. Nature is a place for relaxation of both mind and body. It is filled with sensory experiences; colors, smells, sounds, tastes – and nature's aesthetic values are emphasized. Some of the participants spoke of grandness in nature, and many saw nature as a refuge from modern hectic everyday life; they talked of their preferences for isolated spots, spots where there is no noise, crowds, cars or buildings to be sensed. Nature is seen as providing a spiritual oasis – a place characterized by tranquility, peace, relaxation, and balance.

Participant from The Danish Outdoor Council: "A good experience in nature for me is being away some place, by a river with a fishing rod in my hand or just lying down, listening to the sky larks or the cows chewing their grass, just peace and quiet."

Nature is also a room for recreational activities like walking, camping, running, and fishing. The opportunity to move and be active outside is valued. It is seen as a place for solitude, as well as a place to be with the family, especially children playing and experiencing new things are emphasized. Overall there is a strong emphasis on the relationship between senses, body, mind, and nature in this perspective.

Researcher: "The joy of discovering things, when you're moving through the landscape and through nature. It is the joy it brings you, when you discover a flower that has started growing, or an animal that appears, or when the light falls in a certain way and make a pattern of colors – something that counts just in that very second. Walking from sun to shadow and feeling the change in temperature. In fact being allowed to use all of my body and all of my senses."

Focus in this theme is not solely on nature as an inherent entity separate from man, it is rather on the relationship between humans and the environment and landscapes that surrounds them.

3.4. *The Individual Story and the Three Themes*

The notion of nature as inherent biological value was strongest in the researchers with a biological background. The partner theme was dominant in the farmers' stories, whereas the theme of nature as experiences and activities was most clearly expressed by the outdoor organizations. We want to stress, however, that the conceptions of each individual participant cannot be reduced to one of the three themes. The three themes are the

outcome of our analytical investigation of the ethnographic material and they should be seen as analytic constructions that help grasp the multiplicity and variation in the participants' individual stories.

Overall the debate and the multiplicity in themes illustrate nature as a contextual concept. That is, the definitions and meaning ascribed to nature are dependent on the person telling the story. The personal experience, the profession, and the organizational interests all played a part in the understandings that were voiced.

4. QUALITIES IN NATURE

Part of the research project has been concerned with identifying and developing indicators for monitoring whether nature quality on the organic farms improved. We wanted the participants in the workshop to discuss what they saw as possible indicators for measuring this development, but the discussion was soon marked by the fact that indicators are dependent on the definition of nature as well as the definition of quality. The characteristics that the participants identified as qualities in nature were closely connected to the way they conceptualized nature. In some cases, the qualities in demand were conflicting, others were met by indifference, and some coincided.

The majority of conflicting values were found between the farmers and the biologists. These two perceptions of nature take very different starting points in their views on nature, and the workshop revealed many conflicts between the two groups. The experience and activity perspective was not equally at odds with either farmers or biologists, instead, this perspective seems to have its own specific understandings and values in relation to nature – understandings and values that often hold potential meeting places for farmers and conservationists. Consequently, we will start-off our argumentation by presenting and discussing the conflicts and contrasts we found between the biological and the agrarian perspectives first, and then return to the experience theme represented by the NGOs later in this paper.

We have already mentioned several of the qualities emphasized in the biological perspective like wilderness and authenticity, but there are additional central criteria for evaluating quality in a biological sense: continuity in age and in space, and originality found in native species and habitats (Tybirk and Ejrnæs, 2001; Tybirk et al., 2004). Nature that contains all of these qualities is considered exclusive and worthy of protection and conservation.

To the farmers, these criteria weren't the most important. In the 10 qualitative interviews we had carried out with organic farmers prior to the expert workshop, we found the farmers' interest in botany to be limited or

for some nonexistent. Some had an interest in trees, but few noticed herbs or recognized species in the uncultivated areas (Højring et al., 2004). Likewise, they weren't concerned with authenticity and continuity in the same way as the biologist. The farmers would move small biotopes on their land by removing old ones and establishing new ones, and they saw this substitution of nature elements as relatively unproblematic as long as the aesthetic experience was maintained. From a biological perspective, this is harmful because it destroys biological qualities that have been built up over time; it threatens the values of wilderness, continuity, and authenticity, and it threatens nature as structure and form. Preserving different kinds of flora and fauna is considered significant, since diversity in species and biotopes is important. High diversity is an indication of high nature quality. The biological perspective emphasizes preservation of existing elements, whereas the farmers find human interference necessary to manage and care for the landscape they live in.

The values of wilderness, continuity, and authenticity also meant that, at best, biologists were indifferent to the farmers' concerns for planting trees or establishing little waterholes on their property. In a biological sense, these areas have little quality; they are constructed and often hold few or no rare species. However, the biologists are not against them, because over time they have potential to become areas of higher nature quality. Likewise the biologists hold nothing against the dairy farmers' effort to put starling nest boxes in their fields either, but it is not considered particularly valuable in any way. But to the farmers, it has an important function and they believe it sends a valuable signal of the close relationship between agriculture and nature.

Besides the possible beneficial relationship between farming and nature, qualities in the farmers' perspective are closely linked to the identity and understanding of oneself as a farmer. Nature is seen as closely connected to farming, being close to plants and animals and living with the change of the seasons is strong in the farmers' accounts. They are not particularly interested in nature as details, like species and biotopes, but experience nature more as a whole connected entity on which humans – and farmers in particular – depend and are connected to.

These differences in perceptions found in the project underpin the idea that nature and nature quality are by no means objective but rather normative and contested concepts loaded with values. This realization is central in the discussion on organic agricultures' possible contribution to nature qualities.

Overall, the difference in the participants' perspectives reflects a fundamental difference in the way the actors in this field approach the relationship between organic farming and nature. The biologists take the starting point

that organic agriculture can aid nature; in their view organic farming is a tool to improving the natural habitats. Whereas the farmers and their organizational representatives to a large extent have the opposite point of departure; that nature can aid organic farming. Nature is a tool in the development of organic agriculture both as a valuable partner in relation to production, and as a tool for expanding the concept of organic agriculture, an expansion that can help the future distinction between conventional and organic producers. Like nature, quality is tied to the interests and values of the observer and both can therefore be seen as contextual.

5. THE DISCURSIVE BATTLE

In the course of the workshop, it became evident that the three perspectives did not have equivalent weight and value in the discussion. Some took prominence and provided a stronger argument than others. The biological argument in particular was dominating. An example of this tendency is a conversation with one of the farmers who plans to establish 10 little cabins where people can stay and experience life on the farm and enjoy the landscape and nature that surrounds it. One of the participants from the Danish Outdoor Council asks the farmer if he has any berries and suggests that he could have berries and fruits the guests could pick.

Farmer: "We have rose hip in our hedgerows and we have mirabel, and raspberry. We have all these things."

Participant from the Danish Outdoor Council: "Rose hip isn't so good, they are introduced – they aren't natural."

The group laughs and suggests to the farmer that he better cut them down or the biologist might. The berries were planted by the farmer and are therefore not authentic or original in a biological sense. Although this exchange is filled with humor and expressed jokingly, it highlights a point of divergence between the perspectives.

There were several similar situations. In another exchange, the farmer group discusses a visit that one of the farmers had had recently on his farm, with biologists and researchers discussing the possibilities of a farm nature conservation plan.² The farmer had hosted the group for a walk around his farm to look at the potential qualities he could develop.

² A farm nature conservation plan in a Danish context is a plan made in collaboration between the farmer, his agricultural consultant, and representatives from the local authorities. Taking its starting point in the farm, the plan tries to support and develop the contributions the farmer and his family can make to the natural habitats and the landscape that surrounds them.

Farmer A: “A group like the one we had visit us on Friday, they saw lots of little things that they focused on as positive; there’s a meadow and there’s a moor. And that is all fine, but we farm 350 hectares and it is all connected. We have planted 8 km of hedgerows in the last 10 years – this is some of the nice things as a person that you can walk around in this nature and find shelter, enjoy the stormy weather. But how shall I put it? – that is not nature.”

Farmer B: “No, not in this context.”

The farmer’s definition of nature does not match with those of his visitors. He includes hedgerows and cultivated fields in his experience of nature, whereas the guests are focused primarily on the small biotopes. Their emphasis on authenticity and wilderness means that a newly planted hedgerow is of little quality, but to the farmer it is an important part of his sensing and being in nature. The debate circles around the issue of creating new natural elements versus preserving already existing ones.

We argue that the overall discussion on nature and valuable nature can be viewed as a battle between *discourses*. The anthropologist Kay Milton suggests that discourse in a general sense “*refers to the process through which knowledge is constituted through communication.*” In a more specific sense, discourse in her argument “*refers to a particular mode of communication; a field characterized by its own linguistic conventions, which both draws on and generates a distinctive way of understanding the world*” (1996). Milton argues that exactly because they generate various understandings, discourses will compete in given social contexts. This understanding of discourses as a communicative and cognitive competition provides an insight into the discussions that have taken place within our research project. The different themes and perspectives expressed by the participants can be seen as different “voices” or “sub-discourses” in the discourse of nature and nature quality, each of them trying to define valuable nature, each of them holding their own knowledge. They compete and interact in trying to express their understandings, and the debate is characterized by this multivocality and complexity. However, some voices “speak louder” than others, as we have illustrated, and the questions of knowledge and truth have an important part to play in this interaction.

In his book on Foucault, Dag Heede looks at Foucault’s argumentations on discourses and power. Foucault argues that discourses are subjects for battle. One way of controlling a discourse within this battle is through “the will to truth” (Foucault, 1971; Foucault in Heede, 2002). The will to truth is tied to humans’ innate wish to find truth and to the construction of knowledge. It is constructed and supported through educational and scientific institutions and various practices such as books, publication, libraries, and pedagogies, to mention some. It is also expressed in the way

knowledge is initiated, distributed, and evaluated in a given society. Science is an example of an institutionalization of the will to truth. Foucault argues that this will to truth is dominant and powerful in modern Western societies. Discourses can be authorized and legitimized through a truth filter. That is, if we can substantiate an argument as true, it will overlay other arguments and perspectives in a discourse. Knowledge and truth is, therefore, closely connected to power. In Western societies science holds a special status when it comes to defining truth and, therefore, tends to “speak” with greater authority.

Following this line of thought, one of the biologists argues that if organic agriculture wants to improve their nature quality, there must be a verification from the scientific community that the quality has indeed improved.

Biologist: “There has to be a quality assurance of this. If organic agriculture goes out painting a pretty picture, claiming that organic agriculture is good for nature, you will have a huge bang behind you if it isn’t so.” She continues: “In relation to nature conservation plans I think organic farmers must think carefully and avoid making planting plans. It is my belief that you often fence in the dark and plan to plant out lots of things instead of saying, we will aim to improve and support what we already have.”

From this point of view, a verification or quality assurance of an improved nature quality is an evaluation that must be made by experts with biological training. It is not enough that the farmer creates areas pleasing to the eye or beneficial to his production. The nature related initiatives must have biological qualities in addition to aesthetic, experience, and production-related benefits.

The participants in the research project are aware of the differences in perspective themselves and on several occasions they directly addressed the uneven multivocality.

Consultant: “there are several of the statements today that have sorted things between authenticity and culture – or between nature and culture – this entire borderland between the actual cultivated land and that which is authentic, there is a large area there in between. I think we lack tools to determine quality – if we are to use that word at all – to this whole area where there has been influence. There are plenty of values in this although it is not primeval forest or anything like that.”

The consultant points out the central problem with the concepts of nature versus culture and cultivated versus uncultivated. The concepts play an important role in the definition of nature and underlie much of the disagreement in the discussion, but the difference in perspective constitutes a significant conflict. As Verhoog et al. (2003) rightly point out, if nature is understood as pristine, wild, and without interference from humans, then it

is no longer possible to speak of nature in organic farming. In this understanding, what takes place in the cultivated areas cannot be described as nature. Agriculture in any form is by definition unnatural. In response to this argumentation, the quote illustrates the need expressed by farmers to find and define values in the rural landscape, agricultural values that are different from the traditional biological conservation values; values that can embrace qualities in the borderland between the wild and the cultivated.

The group also discussed the issue of multivocality in relation to the dialogue with the local authorities. They had very different experiences with this communication. One of the participants was a geographer. She worked with developing nature conservation plans. It was her experience that it is beneficial in the communication with the local county to have specific plans to show them of the actions you want to take on the farm. Her statement feeds a reaction from one of the farmers.

Farmer: "I want to be a little provocative and say that you speak the same language as the county's biologist – I don't.

Geographer: I still have to think from the farmer's perspective....

Farmer: Yes, but you have a different education, you have the same education as the county's biologist."

Due to his background, the farmer feels it is hard to get his points and values across when talking to staff in the local authority. They do not have the same qualifications and knowledge. This example touches on the issue of knowledge and power.

One could argue that the discursive asymmetry is an ethical issue – that the biological perspective is the most important one to favor in order to secure sustainability and biodiversity and, therefore, the biological consideration should be favored. It is not part of our argument in this paper, however, to make this ethical and normative assessment, but we do want to stress that when discussing nature, it is important to realize that there are very different ways of conceptualizing nature and qualities in nature before one can enter into an ethical debate and weigh up which is the important consideration to take. Likewise, we do not wish to argue that there are "wrong" or "right" conceptions of nature and nature quality. Although we find the notions to be contested, this does not mean that there is one correct conception, but rather that they all have validity and truth when applied to their own area and logic. The notion of *quality* in the term *nature quality* is not an objective and inherent notion. It is based on an understanding of nature and is, therefore, a social and normative construction.

6. RECTIFICATION OR PLURALISM?

Underlying the discursive battle is a very central aspect in the debate on agriculture and nature: the question of ownership. The change in the European agricultural community's role over the last decades is partly characterized by the fact that the agricultural community's position as an authority on land use has been challenged (Wilson, 2001). Consumer organizations, environmental NGOs, and people moving out from the cities have joined in the debate and have gained stakeholder standing and contributory influence. There has also been an increase in the political attention and regulations applied to agriculture. The involvement of multiple stakeholders makes the question of ownership topical because multiple stakeholders lead to discursive battle. Non-farming actors pluralize the agricultural debate and question the authority of farmers' perception of and interaction with nature. The discursive battle is very much a positioning for the right to define nature and value it – it is a battle for ownership, authority, and influence.

In relation to implementation of nature quality, the challenge within the discursive battle is that discursive competition can potentially lead to rectification; that is some perspectives might be salient or dominant and able to isolate other perspectives, and this rectification is essentially a threat to ownership. If implementation is to be successful, farmers' involvement is crucial and we therefore argue that the debate must allow for plural understandings of nature and for multivocality. Rectification and pluralism are both possible outcomes of discursive communication, but they have very different impacts. Rectification identifies homogenous values and qualities; pluralism makes values and qualities heterogeneous and complex – yet not indifferent, but it requires the ability to handle multiple interests and understandings.

The project *Nature Quality in Organic Farming* has made some of the participating biologists aware of the problems with rectification. Tybirk et al. (2004) point out the insufficiency of traditional biological criteria for evaluating nature quality when measuring and evaluating the farmed land. Like the organic farmers, they argue that the criteria need to be expanded to include considerations for production, landscape aesthetics, nature experiences, and recreational opportunities as well as the more traditional considerations for protection and conservation. This provides an opportunity to combine the themes expressed in the workshop and it is essential to broaden and balance the conception of nature and nature quality.

If pluralism and multivocality are to be achieved, it is dependent on a constructive dialogue on nature quality. Farmers need to know that, when dealing with nature, they enter into a field of common interest where they no

longer have full authority on decision making – an area where their perceptions, actions, and ownership to management will be questioned, and the same applies to the biologist and the NGOs. Polarizing perspectives is not a constructive approach. Farmers and biologists in particular must find common ground, areas where they can agree, and then try to enlarge upon these fields. It is essential that all parties realize that compromises are necessary if we are to move forward in the development of nature and landscape values.

The first step in communication is, therefore, to develop definitions of nature that are capable of accommodating different perspectives. In order to do this, it is important for stakeholders to be aware of their own position as well as to know what perspectives others represent. When a common language has been established, it is easier to find reference points in the discourse that several actors can agree on. One cannot find agreement on indicators before there is a mutual understanding of quality (Noe et al., 2005). Indicators, therefore, also need to accommodate multiple dimensions.

We are aware that pluralism is challenging, because the debate on nature touches on fundamental values and goals within biological conservation (Siipi, 2004) as well as within agriculture. Overall, we found the biological perspective and values to be strong in the contexts of the project; the concept of nature quality is still closely tied to natural scientific and in particular biological definitions and understandings of nature quality (Højring, 2004). With regard to the farmers, we found disagreement in their opinions on organic agriculture's contribution to nature quality. It was often even difficult for them to express concrete expectations of nature quality and their production strategies played a large part in the way they approached the issue (Hansen et al., 2004a). However, by organizing the workshop, we managed to establish a meeting place for the various conceptions and created an opportunity for the discourses to confront each other, and the workshop does leave some optimism for pluralism. There were attempts to combine the perspectives and bridge the discourses. A consultant from the organic farming association tied the notion of authenticity in old crops and livestock types in with the benefits this kind of authenticity could provide for organic farming:

Consultant: “there are qualities in the crops we grow that are authentic and that come from authentic plants that were once wild, but we have tamed them and improved them. This improvement is speeding up at the moment and some people argue it should be even more rapid. But as I see it, holding back this development and trying to preserve some of the original qualities in the plants is one of the nature qualities we should strive for in organic farming.”

The farmers interviewed previously pointed towards enriched soil quality with more micro organisms, better aquatic environment, improved fauna in

the semi-natural areas and grazing of livestock outdoors as possible contributions that could have an effect on the natural elements. Not all of them deal with the uncultivated areas, but they contribute to overall improvements, and there are studies to support the view that organic farming does in fact benefit these areas (Jessel, 2001). These contributions recognize that agriculture is not unnatural. Rather it is a kind of applied biology, dealing with live plants and animals, submitted to the same natural laws as the pristine environments.

Furthermore, it seems that the experience perspective can offer a significant contribution in the debate and conflict between organic farmers and conservationists. From the experience perspective, neither agricultural nor biological qualities are at the center of attention; focus is on people, and the outdoors is seen first and foremost as an aesthetic, recreational, and experiential opportunity. Nature and the outdoors provide a space to learn and enjoy and it carries valuable cultural and natural heritage. Qualities are multiple in the experience perspective. The representatives from the outdoor organizations value variation from an aesthetic point of view. Diversity in nature extends the opportunities for experience. A varied landscape offers more sensuous impulses and more different physical challenges than a monotonous and uniform landscape. Valuable nature is also nature that provides an opportunity to get out and enjoy outdoor life. In this way, the experience perspective does not support the biological perspective over the production perspective or vice versa; rather it ascribes value to both the wild and the cultivated land, since both offer opportunities for experiences and activities. It is not concerned with the contrasts of cultivated versus uncultivated, or culture versus nature. Instead it seems more a question of urban versus rural, or modern hectic life versus tranquility and peace. Exactly because the experience perspective recognizes values in both landscapes, we argue that this view might offer a meeting place for conflicting stakeholders.

In our workshop, the experience perspective was represented primarily by the NGOs, but it is worth noting that the conception of nature as a place for experiences was expressed by several of the other participants as well. It undoubtedly seemed to be the theme where most members of the group could find common ground. This can be explained by the fact that we specifically asked the participants to contribute with both their personal experience as well as their professional and organizational interests. But it is also an indication that the ability to experience and enjoy nature is one that is shared by all people; all actors can meet on the level of personal experiences. We chose to emphasize the personal experiences exactly from the assumption that this perspective holds the best opportunity for a meeting between different actors' perspectives and, therefore, have the potential to reach a common understanding (Højring and Noe, 2004). As individuals, we

have access to understanding multiple perspectives and this is a premise for meaningful communication.

In relation to organic farmers, it is important that they especially are attentive to the experience perspective, since it is very likely that this perspective will resemble the way a large part of the urban population relates to nature. This might provide a helpful insight to the way most people perceive and experience nature, and it seems that these experiences are not as concerned with values of wilderness, authenticity, continuity, and originality. At least the workshop showed several similarities in the way the farmers and the NGOs experienced nature. Like the farmers, the experience perspective focused on nature as a whole rather than on its details. The experience perspective, therefore, provides some support for the farmers' values and strengthens their position in the discursive competition.

7. PERSPECTIVES FOR NATURE QUALITY IN ORGANIC AGRICULTURE

In relation to the question of ownership, there is one final significant issue at stake for the organic farmers in relation to nature quality. The farmers we have worked with have all been convinced that one of the most important assets when discussing nature quality is that nature can be valuable in the marketing and profiling of organic agriculture. The farmers are concerned with the evolution in Danish organic agriculture leading many of their colleagues to quit.³ They consider it important that the concept of organic farming evolves in a way that makes it attractive and sustainable for farmers to keep on farming organically. They see an increased engagement in nature and landscape perspectives as a possible area for this future development, because they believe that it is in the interests of the consumers to pay the farmers to carry out this social task. Nature and landscape, therefore, become important issues in the recommendation and development of organic farming.

Participant from organic farming: "From a business point of view it is a marketing factor. I believe that when people buy organic they have expectations of what they buy and they expect that there is a better nature on organic farms than on other farms. I think there should be, and I believe that it can be used in marketing."

However, a consultant from the organic farmers association pointed out that, if organic farmers are to use nature quality in the profiling and

³ After a very successful development and expansion in the 1990s, organic agriculture in Denmark has seen a decrease in the number of practicing organic farmers in the last couple of years (Danish Plant Directorate, 2004). Increased competition and extensive structural changes in Danish agriculture overall might offer some of the explanation for this decline (Hansen, 2004; Kaltoft and Risgaard, 2004).

marketing of organic farming, the efforts need to be unambiguous and communicable.

Consultant: "It needs to be communicable. It is very hard to sell a diffuse message on nature quality. This is part of the reason why they (the organic farmers) do not, and did not when it was introduced three years ago, buy into the idea of nature quality as an unambiguous argument that it is immediately useful. It is difficult. We need to find parameters that are measurable, unambiguous, and applicable to all organic farmers, so that we can say as an example all organic farmers have 10% higher nature quality."

The farmers are, therefore, interested in finding qualities that can be generalized. They want to be able to communicate a story to consumers of organic farming and nature that is credible, general, and across-the-board. However, if the organic farmers are to succeed in this strategy of using nature as part of the profiling and marketing of organic farming, then the story must have the ability to accommodate other stakeholder perspectives and expectations.

Overall, the complexity in conceptualization of nature constitutes significant challenges in relation to organic farming. If the organic farmers want to follow their principles and develop organic agriculture's position on nature qualities, as they have indicated in this research project, then it will be vital that these initiatives meet consumers' expectations and societal demands. Farmers need to be attentive to the fact that these demands and expectations of the kind of nature quality they should produce are not homogenous but rather complex and may diverge to a great extent from their own views. Consumers may emphasize environmental issues, or aesthetic and experiential qualities that will be different from the biological qualities we have seen being demanded by the biologists. Verhoog et al.'s (2003) study on consumers of organic products suggests that they experience nature spontaneously, rather than biological and pristine and Ilsøe (2004) points out that Danish consumers often link environmental concerns with issues of personal health. The Danish Outdoor Council wanted organic farmers to be pioneers for access, to the open land, since without access people cannot be out enjoying nature. They advocated transparency and dialogue and saw organic farming making an active contribution to the educational aspect of teaching people how to behave in and appreciate nature. The outdoor organizations required different arrangements, like open house days on farms and guided walks through valuable areas and saw these as positive and attractive experiences. These qualities are important for farmers to consider. If they wish for nature to be marketable, it needs to be accessible and enjoyable not just to farmers themselves but also ultimately to the consumers who have to choose to buy organic.

Consequently, it is necessary for organic farmers and their organizations to consider which expectations they wish to meet and what values they intend to work on. They need to relate to each of the three perspectives identified in this paper and carefully rethink what kind of nature quality they can offer. They need to carefully consider their own conception of and connection to nature and clarify this before they communicate this relationship to the public. The discussions in the workshop illustrated the future challenges that face organic farming in terms of definition and ownership.

Ultimately, the decisions will be made by individual organic farmers and it is, therefore, likely that there will be pluralism in the qualities they choose to emphasize.

8. CONCLUSION

The intention to improve the agricultural community's contribution to nature and landscape is an appealing one and one in agreement with societal expectations. However, in order for the intention to be successfully fulfilled, implementation needs to go hand in hand with communication. Implementation of nature quality is dependent on communication about nature quality and vice versa. Furthermore, this communication must accommodate and include multiple interests and stakeholders. The relationship between nature and agriculture is not solely of interest to farmers or biologists; the question of management of our common nature involves local communities in the rural areas, consumer groups, and outdoor organizations, and it also has potential political interest. In this context, the understanding that different actors have different applications of nature, qualities in nature, and indicators of quality, and that these are related to the interest they represent and the agenda they wish to promote, is an important realization in future dialogue between different interest groups.

The ability to accommodate plural perceptions of nature is an essential and challenging issue, but if implementation is to be successful, it is important to have and handle a pluralistic perception of nature and nature quality. Actors in this field need to be able to accommodate a degree of pluralism in their conception and it must be a condition that actors do not force their understandings onto others or perceive theirs as misconception. It is essential to respect each other's ways of experiencing nature and actors must be willing to enter into an equal debate and try to identify quality criteria that are acceptable to multiple perspectives.

The project *Nature Quality in Organic Farming* has focused mainly on organic farmers and natural scientists and their definitions and understandings of nature, and although the expert workshop provided an opportunity to include the viewpoints of NGOs, our empirical material and

insights are still strongest with regard to farmers and scientists. In further research on this issue, it will be beneficial and relevant to expand the focus and include several actors. There are many reasons for believing that non-farming actors in the future will play an increasing role in the development of agriculture, and research involving perspectives and viewpoints of neighbors, consumers, environmental interest groups, and so forth will be important. This is most obvious when dealing with questions of rural development and multi-functional agriculture. The surrounding society plays a central role in these developments and the relationship should, therefore, be taken seriously and subjected to empirical studies. If we are to gain an understanding of the transformation of modern agriculture, we need to broaden the perspective, look beyond the macro level concerned with political and policy issues, and pay attention to the multiple actors involved in implementing the new policies.

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