



A wild controversy: Cooperation and competition among landowners, hunters, and other outdoor recreational land-users in Denmark



J. Emborg*, C. Gamborg

Department of Food and Resource Economics, University of Copenhagen, Rolighedsvej 23, 1958 Frederiksberg C, Denmark

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines cooperation and competition among landowners, hunters, and other outdoor recreational land-users in Denmark in relation to recreational hunting. The study used an internet-based questionnaire, sent to representative samples of, respectively, the Danish public ($n=1001$), hunters ($n=1130$) and landowners ($n=1207$). A series of qualitative interviews with a sample of landowners and hunters determined their approach to conflict management. The findings showed that relatively few negative encounters take place between hunters and other users compared to the frequency of such incidents between other outdoor recreational users. The relatively low levels of conflict may be explained by the more collaborative approach taken by hunters and landowners (who provide hunting opportunities) and the low degree of interdependence between hunters and other recreational users. Information about conflicts and ways of handling them may help predict and address future sites of potential negative interactions between different user groups and hunters, given changes in land management or policy-making. The article proposes a revised analytical framework for analyzing such conflicts.

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1. Introduction

Recreation-based conflicts have increased in recent decades (Cordell and Tarrant, 2002), becoming a common problem facing managers, stakeholders and policy makers (Hammitt and Schneider, 2000). Conflict seems to be the rule rather than the exception in socioecological systems, as seen in recreational fisheries (Arlinghaus, 2005) and pursuits involving humans and wildlife (Rosell and Llimona, 2012). Not only has participation in outdoor recreation increased, the diversity of recreational pursuits has also grown. Both these developments have increased the potential for land-use conflicts (Reis and Higham, 2009). Hunting especially seems to provoke strong judgements of what is 'right' or 'wrong' (Fischer, 2013).

Factors contributing to outdoor recreational conflicts include activity style, resource specificity, perception of the natural environment, the degree of conservation issues involved (Redpath et al., 2013) and level of tolerance towards others' lifestyles (Jacob and Shreyer, 1980). While outdoor recreation certainly needs to be recognized as a land use interest in its own right (Stenseke and Hansen, 2014), outdoor recreational conflicts involve much more than competition over land. They also reflect the orientation of recreationists and their motivation for participation (Jackson and

Wong, 1982). Typically recreational conflicts exist at two levels, direct contact and indirect confrontation (Jackson and Wong, 1982), and characterized by being asymmetrical, such that one party is more powerful and/or dependent than the other (Schneider et al., 2013; Ramthun, 1995). Hence, the degree and quality of social interaction are important for each party's perception of conflict.

Conflicts have been witnessed over a wide variety of outdoor recreational activities: especially horseback riding (Watson et al., 1993), dog walking and mountain biking (Rossi and Pickering, 2012), cross-country skiing and snowmobiling (Jackson and Wong, 1982). Depending on the type of activity, conflicts can involve forest visitors (Bakhtiari et al., 2014) and land-owners as well as recreational hunters (MacMillan and Leitch, 2008). It is important to understand the perceptual causes of conflict and how the parties involved cope with and potentially resolve conflict (Hammitt and Schneider, 2000). According to White and Ward (2010), interdisciplinary approaches are needed to address conflicts occurring in relation to outdoor recreational activities. In particular, the way conflict participant's deal with conflict situations may be linked to their perception of interaction with other visitors and owners and more specifically, as Eliason (2014) points out, there is a need for additional research on attitudes and perceptions of hunters towards factors affecting the hunting experience, notably perceived disturbances to the hunt by other recreationists.

Hunting is a multifunctional activity, including functions of conservation, recreation, sustaining of rural economies and livelihoods (Fischer et al., 2012). Denmark is densely populated, with

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: jee@ifro.ku.dk (J. Emborg).

many recreational hunters – one out of 33 adults has a hunting licence, a high proportion compared to countries such as the Netherlands (1:618) and the UK (1:76), but lower than Sweden (1:31), although Sweden has much more huntable land per capita (FACE, 2010). At the same time, hunting remains a contested pastime for Danes (Jensen et al., 2011), although a more recent study has shown that 45% of the general public have a ‘somewhat positive’ or ‘very positive’ attitude towards hunting as such, while only 25% are ‘somewhat’ or ‘very negative’ towards hunting (Gamborg and Jensen, 2016). In Denmark, most land-based hunting takes place on privately-owned land. Practically all farmland and about two-thirds of the forest area in Denmark are privately owned. All private forests larger than five hectares are open for public access by law and include the right to hike, walk dogs, bike, and pick mushrooms during daylight, but not the right to fish, hunt or camp. Hence, most hunting must take place in conjunction with other users. Altogether, this could imply a potential for conflict around hunting in Denmark. Landowners may use the hunting privileges themselves, share with family and friends and/or rent out the hunt privileges to individual hunters or hunting clubs. For some land-ownerships, particularly the larger estates, the hunt privileges represent a considerable economic asset (Lundhede et al., 2009).

In this multiple land-use context, the question is whether hunters can take for granted that they have precedence to use the land, as still more parties are claiming priority access in outdoor recreation. Answering such questions requires knowledge about the interfaces between the hunting and non-hunting environments. Few have described such interactions, and as result of lack of knowledge, land-use conflicts may arise, of which the causes are not well-understood and therefore may be poorly managed (Pinet, 1995). The course and outcome of such conflicts may have significant impact on public discourse and thus on public policy formation, while land-use policies have the power to create frames and incentives that may encourage or discourage land-use conflicts on the ground (Forester, 1989; Daniels et al., 2012). However, before describing interaction in greater depth it is important to get a sense of the frequency of interactions between different types of users and get a representative picture of how such interactions, or at least meetings, are perceived by the different users. This paper examines land-based conflicts around recreational hunting in Denmark, and identifies how they are handled using the theories of cooperation and competition (Deutsch, 2014) and social interdependence (Johnson and Johnson, 2005). The research questions are: i) How do hunters and non-hunters respectively perceive their interaction? ii) How do hunters and landowners (some of whom are hunting providers) respectively perceive their interaction? And iii) How do hunters and/or landowners approach conflicts? The paper is structured as follows. First, we review the theory of cooperation and competition which we will use as an analytical framework to explore the social interactions of recreational hunting. Second, we present a detailed methodological account of the survey of recreationists and qualitative interviews. After presenting which kind of interactions take place and how they are perceived, we discuss the ensuing coping strategies and conflict handling approaches, and the management and policy implications of these findings.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. General theory of cooperation and competition

Conflict definitions abound; seemingly every social science discipline has their own. There is a grey zone determining when a land-use and outdoor recreation situation is considered a conflict proper or ‘merely’ an example of disgust, annoyance and nuisance associated with on-site recreation (Hammitt and Schneider, 2000).

Here we define conflict in a broad sense as “perceived divergence of interest, a belief that the parties’ current aspirations are incompatible” (Pruitt and Kim, 2004). The course a conflict takes is by and large determined by the strategic approaches taken by the conflicting parties, i.e. whether they take oppositional steps conducive to competition (fight) or they take promotive steps aimed at resolving the conflict through cooperation (Johnson and Johnson, 1989; Deutsch, 2014). Cooperation and competition is fundamentally the mutually constructed character of the social interaction taking place in a situation, when actors give meaning to each other’s action through responding. It takes two to tango – it takes two to cooperate or compete. However, each individual actor can take cooperative steps, or follow a collaborative strategic approach in order to conduce or seek cooperation. Consistent with this perspective on social interaction among individuals we have in our wording distinguished those instances where we refer to the *cooperative/competitive* strategy (or approach) chosen by each actor, as opposed to the interactional outcome of those actions – the inter-relational act of *cooperation* (or *competition*) (in line with Johnson and Johnson, 1989; Daniels and Walker, 2001; Deutsch, 2014).

Cooperation is a deeply founded form of social interaction among human beings, associated with a potential for long-term mutual gains and evolutionary success (Axelrod, 1984; Nowak, 2006). Competition is an equally deeply seated form of social interaction, associated with the need for safeguarding resources, self-protection and the ability to escape critical situations by combatting threats (Deutsch, 2000; Nowak, 2006). Whether an individual chooses a cooperative or competitive strategy depends on the person as well as the situation at hand (Pruitt and Kim, 2004). If both parties choose cooperative strategies, they should be able to find a common and mutually beneficial way forward. If both choose competitive strategies, one might be harmed while the other might come out as the eventual winner. If one party takes a cooperative approach while the other chooses a competitive approach, a quite complicated potentially and exploitative situation may develop (Fisher and Ury, 1981; Axelrod, 1984; Pruitt and Kim, 2004; Deutsch 2014).

The theory of cooperation and competition identifies relevant factors to describe the interaction among parties in conflict – one of these being interdependence (Johnson and Johnson, 1989; Deutsch, 2014). The theory distinguishes between two types of social interdependence – positive versus negative interdependence – as well as independence that is the absence of social interdependence. Social interdependence exists when individuals’ outcomes are affected by each other’s actions (Johnson and Johnson 1989, 2005; Deutsch 2014). Positive interdependence exists when two individuals are linked so one cannot succeed (or benefit) unless the other succeeds (or benefits) as well (and vice versa). Negative interdependence exists when two individuals are linked so that one cannot succeed (or benefit) if the other succeeds (or benefits) (and vice versa).

The basic premise of social interdependence theory is that the structure of the parties’ goals in the situation determines the strategic choices of the parties and how they interact. Those interactions in turn determine the outcomes of the situation (Johnson and Johnson, 2005; Deutsch, 2014). Generally, positive interdependence induces cooperation, while negative interdependence induces competition. No interdependence (independence) induces individualistic efforts (Johnson and Johnson, 1989; Deutsch, 2014). The theory predicts that when parties choose collaborative approaches, the conflict is likely to remain at low escalation levels, while escalation is more likely when the parties choose competitive approaches (Deutsch, 2014; Pruitt and Kim, 2004). Since humans are reflexive in nature, they are able to make considered choices regarding own thinking, behaviour, and even to some extent about emotions in any given situation (Rosenberg, 1990). This implies that it is possible to influence the course of

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