



Trust related dynamics in contested land use A longitudinal study towards trust and distrust in intergroup conflicts in the Baviaanskloof, South Africa



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ABSTRACT

Using insights about in-group and intergroup dynamics from social identity theory and sociology, we studied trust dynamics in intergroup relations in the Baviaanskloof (South Africa) over time. We conclude that in-group interpretations of intergroup interactions contribute to the lack of trust and ongoing reconstruction of distrust towards the other group. Constructions of group identities and group history reinforce differences between groups, shaping expectations about the behaviour of in-group and out-group members. In this process, seemingly unrelated past events and contextual changes were connected as uncontested arguments as to why the other group could not be trusted. The lack of trust and growing distrust stabilised group dynamics and thus distrust towards the other group. These inter- and in-group dynamics explain why adapting to major environmental changes, and future collaboration becomes more difficult in conflict situations.

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Prologue

Farmers: *'from the beginning there was not much trust [in] the project manager, the mafia, or whoever was involved ... they wanted to bulldozer us out [of the Baviaanskloof].'* And *'Maybe I am an old farmer, but ... I got the idea of the PMU [governmental conservation organisation], nature conservationists, and all that stuff on one side and 17 farmers on the other side, fighting against each other over the years.'*

Nature conservationists: *'There are always problems with farmers! You know, you are talking about agriculture versus conservation.'* *'There is always a mistrust barrier because of the conflicts that happened 20 years ago.'*

These quotes illustrate the relation between two groups in a conflict over nature restoration and the expansion of a nature reserve on privately owned agricultural land in the Baviaanskloof, South Africa. Such developments take place in various forms in South Africa and have a large influence on the countryside and its inhabitants (Brooks et al., 2011). The quotes show that in this case the relation was characterised by an enormous amount of mutual distrust that developed over a long period of time. Recent attempts at planning and policymaking were

seriously hampered by this discordant trust relation between the most important groups in the area (Crane, 2006). Following these quotes, the question arises: How did this distrust emerge and develop between the two groups?

1. Introduction

The Baviaanskloof (Baboons gorge) is an isolated valley in Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. The mountains on both sides are part of the Baviaanskloof Nature Reserve (BNR), whereas the valley floor around the river and the surrounding hill slopes are used for agriculture. These areas are regarded as an important link in the Baviaanskloof ecosystem. In recent history, the BNR's managing nature conservation organisations made various attempts to incorporate the valley floor into the reserve, as this would allow species access to the river and adjacent grasslands. In these attempts, the nature conservation organisations deployed various strategies ranging from land acquisition to stewardship programmes. As most farmers wanted to continue farming in the valley, these attempts led to a wide range of negotiations, discussions, and persistent conflicts between farmers and nature conservationists.

Negotiations and conflicts between groups over land-use practices, nature restoration, and natural resources regularly occur (Vermeulen and Cotula, 2010; Idrissou et al., 2011; Peters, 2013). One of the characteristics of intergroup negotiations and conflicts is that the groups involved hold strong, diverging perspectives on the issue at stake, their own role, and the role of the other group or groups (James, 2000). In

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these perspectives, in-group ideas and members are strongly favoured over those of other groups (Elias and Scotson, 1994). Thus, in-group members are regarded as trustful partners in conflictive situations, whereas members from other groups are approached with distrust (Elias and Scotson, 1994; Kramer and Carnevale, 2001; Tam et al., 2009). Consequently, trust and distrust are at the heart of intergroup conflicts.

The importance of intergroup negotiation has gained attention in various fields relating to public services and administration (Kramer and Carnevale, 2001), partly influenced by a wider governmental reform often referred to as the shift towards governance (Van Ark and Edelenbos, 2005). Governance aims to bring about collective, binding decisions in relation to public services, but this can be difficult because of diverging ideas, values, and norms (North, 2005). As a result of this reform, interest groups are increasingly recognised as important stakeholders in processes for environmental change. Both scholars and practitioners have developed and discussed various strategies and approaches in order to deal with diverging convictions of groups and their accompanying conflicts (Healey, 1997; Höppner et al., 2007; Van Woerkum et al., 2011). In these discussions and approaches, trust is often mentioned as an important concept for successful intergroup cooperation (see amongst others Höppner et al., 2007).

Despite the frequent claims about the importance of trust and distrust in relation to intergroup negotiations, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the emergence and evolution of trust relations in intergroup contexts *over time*. Studying trust relations over time is highly relevant, as trust and distrust are not static concepts but rather develop between people through a series of interactions (Lewicki et al., 2006; Idrissou et al., 2013). Because the time aspect is often overlooked, empirical studies giving insight into how trust relations emerge and evolve in intergroup relations are scarce. In the current paper, we aim to contribute to this knowledge and focus on the question: How do trust relations emerge and evolve over time in intergroup conflicts?

To operationalise our research question, we combine insights from studies on trust and intergroup relations. We first explore trust dynamics in relation to trust and distrust. To understand intergroup relations, we adopt theories from the fields of social psychology and sociology. In social psychology, we build upon social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982) to clarify how people define themselves in in-group relations, whereas we largely follow ideas from the field of sociology to shed light on intergroup relations (Elias and Scotson, 1994). Using these theories, we examine the Baviaansklouf case to analyse longitudinal trust dynamics in intergroup relations.

2. Theoretical considerations

2.1. Trust and trust dynamics

Trust relations have been studied for several decades and in various fields (Möllering, 2001; Tyler and Kramer, 1996). In these studies, trust as well as distrust are studied from different perspectives and using diverse conceptualisations. Although theoretical studies regard trust and distrust as interactional concepts, empirical studies concerning trust relations often have a strongly static character. These empirical studies often focus on measuring the amount of trust or distrust, or on the object or form of trust, and do not include the various underlying mechanisms and processes that lead to trust or distrust (Lewicki et al., 2006). Consequently, these studies show *that* trust and distrust develop but fail to explain *how* and *why* trust and distrust develop, and thus fail to take into account the dynamics that come with social interaction. In order to gain a better understanding of trust relations in interaction, we adopt a perspective taking into account trust dynamics (Lewicki and Bunker, 1996; Lewicki et al., 2006; Van Oortmerssen et al., 2013). These trust dynamics can lead to trust and, or distrust.

From a dynamics perspective, trust and distrust can be conceptualised as individuals' dynamic expectation about the thoughts, behaviour, and

decisions of other people (Lewicki and Bunker, 1996; Idrissou et al., 2011; Van Oortmerssen et al., 2013). These expectations are constantly balanced in terms of past experiences and what one person knows about another person (O'Brien, 2001; Lewicki et al., 2006). The image of the other is constructed out of accumulating interactions and the interpretations of the actions of the others in these interactions, and related contexts (De Vries et al., 2014a). These interactions have various characteristics stretching from discussions to moments of passing each other, and can be frequent or even absent for a while (De Vries et al., 2014b). These characteristics and frequencies influence the image as well. This image provides information ranging from specific knowledge about characteristics and identities to more general information about common values and norms (Uslaner and Conley, 2003). Given this image and its relation to present-day events, individuals may experience uncertainty, risks, control, and vulnerability. These experiences influence not only the perspective on the past, but also expectations about future events, actions, and decisions. Consequently, these experiences influence trust dynamics. In this process, new interactions result in new experiences, and with the gradual accumulation of new experiences, the image of the past and trust-related expectations about the future are adjusted. These adjusted expectations can lead to trust or distrust. Trust and distrust are then temporal outcomes that are constantly rebalanced under the influence of interpretations of accumulating series of interactions with others. In addition, trust dynamics are influenced by the particular situation in which they are performed (Mayer et al., 1995; Kadefors, 2004; Van Oortmerssen et al., 2013). Trust and distrust are always expressed in a context characterised by specific choice options. Within interactions, people continuously interpret the developments in their social environment and the consequences that these might have. These interpretations and consequent actions can result in new information, new experiences, or new interpretations of past events that might lead to either enhancing or restricting opportunities to trust or not (Van Oortmerssen et al., 2013).

Through series of accumulating interactions, their frequency and characteristics of trust dynamics may, over time, lead to trust, distrust or both. Trust and distrust should be defined as separate and distinct constructs, and as they are very specific, can exist next to each other (Lewicki et al., 1998). Trust towards the other is derived from cooperative behaviour of the interaction partner, whereas distrust follows from uncooperative behaviour. Luhmann (1979) argues that both trust and distrust play a vital role in managing social relations, and the uncertainties and complexities that come with these. In these relations, trust reduces complexity by ruling out undesirable options and focusing on a positive outcome. Distrust functions in a similar way by focusing on the negative outcome (Luhmann, 1979). As such, trust and distrust are both dynamic concepts, influencing trust dynamics through related uncertainties and expectations.

2.2. Social identity and group membership

Studies on trust focus largely on individual trust in, for instance, other individuals, organisations, and institutions (Kramer and Carnevale, 2001). It is, however, widely recognised that people's behaviour, thoughts, ideas, and decisions are largely influenced by their social environment. This also holds for trust. For instance, if everyone says not to trust a certain person, this is likely to influence people's trust in that person. This implies that understanding trust dynamics requires understanding the social environment in which trust develops and evolves.

In order to gain insight into trust in intergroup relations, we turn to social identity theory, as this theory focuses on how people define themselves in group contexts (Idrissou et al., 2011). Social identity theory (SIT) was introduced by Tajfel (1982) and Turner (1975). Their initial theory refers to 'the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership' (Tajfel, 1982, 292). According to SIT, people behave differently in groups because they adhere to their group's norms and identity (Ashforth and Meal, 1989; Leary

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