

# Conflicting perspectives: a scientific and democratic challenge

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## "Naïve, selfish and harmful"

Feature article by Poul Vejby-Sørensen from "Sustainable Agriculture"

### Naivt, egoistisk og skadeligt

AF POUL VEJBY-SØRENSEN

**M**ed medlemram foregår Danmarks Naturfredningsforening, Økologisk Landsforening med flere, at Danmark skal søre stort på økologi. Nu under valgkampen hopper naive politikere på limpsiden, uden at forholde sig til realitet i dette land. Nogle vil forhindre den økologiske produktion inden 2020. Andre vil have 100 procent økologi i 2040. Så kan det ikke blive værre. De ved ikke, hvad de taler om.

Tankerne leder hen på historien, hvor Sovjet blev mislykket af et politisk regime under Stalin, som ligeledes flirtede med tanken om, at godning ikke var nødvendig. Disse fuldstændigt urealistiske forestillinger betyde landbrugs i uløse og blev en katastrofe for Sovjet.

Fuld tvangsomlægning til økologi vil blive en lige så stor katastrofe for Danmark.

Selv om nogle finder det romantisk, må vi se i øjnene, at vi ikke kan vende tilbage til fortiden, hvor alle levede økologisk og i øvrigt ikke havde andre muligheder. Vi kan ikke i 2015 kene videre i hjulspor fra 1800-tallet.

Der var gode grunde til, at vores forfædre, som var dygtige håndværkere i landbrug og fag, skaffede spor og udviklede kulturteknikken og dyktningsteknikken, især gennem de seneste 150 år. Det har bragt os frem til et moderne næringsbalanceret landbrug, der er langt mere avanceret end økologikonceptet.

Økologisk produktion kan ikke konkurrere, hvad angår udbytte, økonomi, miljøvenlighed, klimavenlighed og naturbevarelse. Og det er en myte, at økologiske produkter skulle være sundere end andre produkter.

I realitetens verden har vi tre valgmuligheder: At forkeste tanken om økologisk produktion i størrelsen, at indtage store dele af verdens tilbageværende naturareser – herunder regnskov – til fødevarerproduktion eller at acceptere, at verdensbefolkningen decimeres af fødemangel og at millioner lider sultedøden.

Fremover skærpes kapløbet mellem befolkningstal og fødevarerproduktion. På den ene side får verden stadig flere munde at mætte og en milliard kinesere vil have flere tænder far ris. På den anden side øder byudvikling og trafik den mest værdifulde landbrugsgodt. Derfor skal jorden anvendes effektivt.

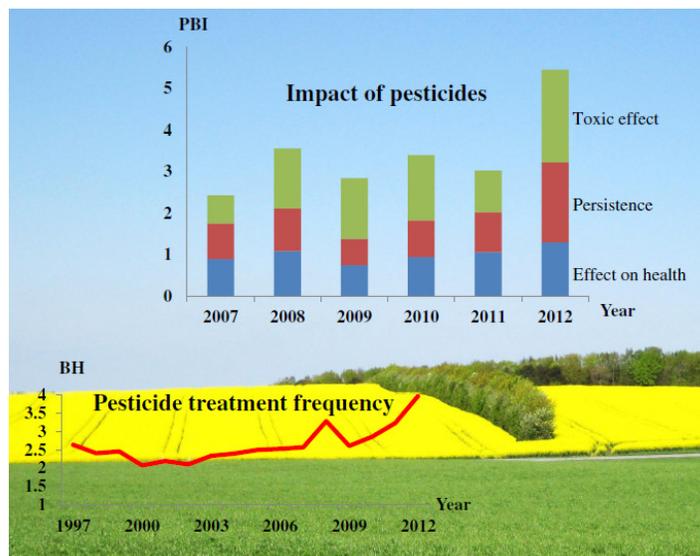
Talene bag udviklingen i menneskebefolkning på den ene side og fødevarerproduktionen på den anden side taler deres eget sprog. For 4000 år siden var verden befolket af omkring 100 millioner mennesker. I år er der tal fordoblet til cirka 200 millioner. Omkring år 1400 var der den skønede befolkning til



There has been a growth and specialization in research in sustainability

- Nutrient losses and eutrophication
- Groundwater protection (drinking water)
- Biodiversity, nature quality (authentic | rich)
- Landscape quality
- Animal welfare (health | care | natural life)
- Rural development
- Etc.

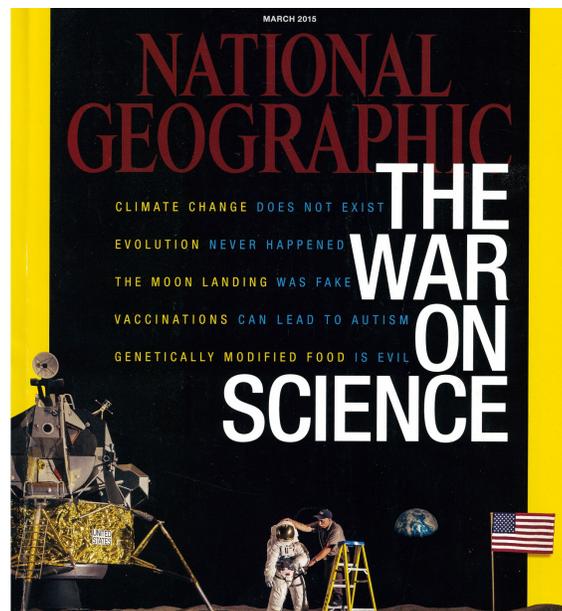
Research has not lead to a more “sustainable” practice



## Why does more research not lead to more sustainability ?

- Earlier we have addressed this as e.g.:
  - a problem of “implementation” of science in practice
  - a decoupling from the semantics of sustainability due to organizational differentiation within agriculture and food
- Here we look at the use of science in public debate (irritated by the feature article)
- There are many current examples that reflect on the use of science in public debate, and which illustrate this challenge:

What's causing reasonable people to doubt reason?



The (mis)use of science is recognized



Bringing in scientists for authority

**The New York Times** | <http://nyti.ms/1KRWOiu>

U.S.

## Food Industry Enlisted Academics in G.M.O. Lobbying War, Emails Show

By ERIC LIPTON SEPT. 5, 2015

WASHINGTON — At Monsanto, sales of genetically modified seeds were steadily rising. But executives at the company's St. Louis headquarters were privately worried about attacks on the safety of their products.

So Monsanto, the world's largest seed company, and its industry partners retooled their lobbying and public relations strategy to spotlight a rarefied group of advocates: academics, brought in for the gloss of impartiality and weight of authority that come with a professor's pedigree.

## In summary – not quite what we are after

- All present the issue as an issue of science versus irrationality
- The “war on science” view is not helpful
- Lacks recognition of the (mis)use of different scientific perspectives

## Hypothesis

- The growing number of available scientific perspectives are used as “conflicting perspectives” in tactical games of debate in society.

## The aim

- The aim is to explore how different scientific perspectives are involved in the public “democratic” debate
- and to explore the underlying mechanisms of the tactical games,
- using a systems theoretical and perspectivist approach to see how scientific perspectives are mobilised into the public democratic debate.

## Analyses

1. *“Naïve, selfish and harmful”*  
Feature article in Weekendavisen by Poul Vejby-Sørensen from the farmer association “Sustainable Agriculture”
2. The fact-finding program *Detektor*

WE ARE RATIONAL, YOU ARE IDEOLOGICAL OR  
THE HIDDEN INTEREST

*“If all agricultural land in the world was farmed organically there would only be food for four billion people. Today we are over seven billion and in 2050 we will be over nine billion. ... Those who want to enforce the conversion of agricultural production to 100% organic must consider what part of the earth’s population they imagine should be sacrificed on the altar of ideology.”*

ANALOGY TO FAILED SCIENCE

*“Some will double the organic production by 2020. Some want 100% organics by 2050. It can’t become any worse. They don’t know what they are talking about. Thoughts are led to history, where the Soviet Union was mistreated by a political regime under Stalin, which in the same way flirted with the idea that fertilisers are not necessary. These completely unrealistic ideas led agriculture astray and became a disaster for the Soviet Union. Enforced conversion to organics will be an equally big disaster for Denmark.”*

## THE NOBEL PRIZE ARGUMENT OR THE BETTER SCIENCE

*“The so-called Haber-Bosch method [for the production of nitrogen fertiliser], invented by Fritz Haber and further developed by Carl Bosch, earned them both a Nobel Prize in chemistry in 1918 and 1931 respectively. Their invention was of enormous importance and has saved billions of people from starving to death. Among a circle of Nobel Prize winners exactly the awards for Haber and Bosch were selected as the most important for humanity ever.”*

## MARKET IS RATIONAL AND POLICY IS RELIGION OR THE ECONOMY, STUPID OR THE HEGEMONIC PERSPECTIVE

*“Then what is the conclusion? Let the organic production develop on market terms, so that it achieves the size consumers want in their prioritisation. It is completely unacceptable that the state, without documentation, uses public means to promote a politically selected form of production that leads to far larger problems than ordinary modern production in terms of yield, environment, nature conservation and economy – and which has no health benefits either. In a proper democracy spending billions must be substantiated with more than just some vague political-religious ideas. But when the election campaign starts, naïve politicians become the nature’s worst enemies.”*

### CONSTRUCTING A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE OR STEALING THE AGENDA

*“Organic agriculture is not only a romantic niche. It is also naïve and selfish. Naïve because the concept is not sustainable. Selfish because the concept will lead to devastating consequences for nature and climate. ... It is climate-hostile because of increased emission of greenhouse gases, it is environmentally damaging because of larger emissions of nutrients, and it is nature-hostile because of lesser yields and therefore larger demands for land. ... Luxury use of land will obviously be detrimental to the world’s natural resources. On this basis, organic agriculture is one of the worst enemies of the rainforest.”*

### SUMMING UP ON THE FEATURE ARTICLE ANALYSIS

- We have identified different tactics used and shown how they relate to the use of the idea of rationality, the authority of science and different scientific perspectives.
- The analysis also shows the lack of demands for overall argumentative coherency in the debate.
- A particularly salient characteristic is the double bind use of science in the debate: science is used to support authority and at the same time to undermine authority.

### FACT-FINDING AS A POSSIBLE REMEDY

- Is this not just a question of a skilful rhetorician manipulating with facts?
- Can fact-finding solve the problem?

### DETEKTOR IN THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

- Builds on the idea of a common rational basis
- Leads to contradictory facts (730.000 | 800.000)
- Facts depend on assumptions
  
- In effect, the programme ends up illustrating the failure of its very basis, the idea of a common rationality that can support rational decisions.

## Discussion - Why is this?

- Why this seeming impotence of the otherwise robust rules of engagement in democratic debates toward the tactical use of different perspectives?
- One might think the answer lies in the lack of an overall rationality in society, in which the different perspectives can be compared.

## Discussion - Why is this?

- Luhmann's systems theory says that society has differentiated into a number of autopoietic functional systems with different internal logics
- Science, the function system that is concerned with truth, has further differentiated into a wealth of specialized systems for observation
- Therefore, we don't think there is any hope of establishing such a common rationality.
- But it is the idea of an overall rationality, or a common rational space, that makes the game of conflicting perspectives possible.

**Main point 1: Rational argumentation exist only within perspectives**

- We must give up the idea, or ideology, of a common rational space
- The rational space cannot incorporate more perspectives
- Rationality only exist within system's logics (1.order perspectives)

**Main point 2: This is not a matter of conflicting interests**

- The public debate can handle the matter of conflicting interests
- But not conflicting perspectives
- The interest and values are hidden behind the rationale of rational arguments

### Main point 3: The tactical game

- The game is constructed as a discussion of facts and not values (facts against values)
- Tactical use (or construction) of different perspectives to support the arguments
- Facts belongs to perspectives, the idea of the shared rational space conflicts with the idea of differentiated perspectives (hides the assumptions)

### Main point 4: The double bind of the tactical game

- If you enter the discussion you accept the premises of the game – if you don't you accept the arguments
- The premise of the game: it is a rational argumentation without values and assumptions, and disagreement is a matter of the rational | irrational distinction
- If you enter the game with rational arguments, you accept the premises of the game - if you enter the game with value arguments, you loose, because the game says it is a rational discussion

## Conclusion 1

- Initial paradox: the differentiation of more specialised perspectives does not lead to more sustainable development.
- On the contrary this leads to increase of complexity and increased possibilities for tactical games.
- This is a challenge to the democratic public debate.

## Conclusion 2

- Attentions to the role of perspectives can reveal the tactical game and help clarify the debate:
  - Describe the perspectives that are used in the debate
  - Reveal the interests
  - Attach facts to perspectives
  - Insist on the necessity on discussion of values
  - Attention to the mechanism of protection of perspectival blindness
- This can only be done by way of 2. order observations

## Paradox of truth

- Science is the function system that operates with the distinction true | false
- But the differentiation of science into different scientific perspectives makes it impossible to operate with an overall distinction between true and false

## Paradox of rationality

- The main paradox of democratic debate in society today is that: it is the very idea of a common rational space which prevents us from having a “rational” critical public debate. It is this very idea that makes the game of conflicting perspectives possible
- The question is whether this paradox is also found within social systems theory – seen as a part of the tradition of critical theory