

THE GREAT NATURE DIALOGUE

We all live in multiple
relationships with nature

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**The Great Nature Dialogue –
We all live in multiple relationships with nature**

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Contents

Preface	2
Summary	3
1 Introduction	4
2 Data: Discussions of the Great Nature Dialogue	7
3 The many meanings of nature and Finns' relationship with nature	9
3.1 What is Finnish nature made of?	9
3.2 Nature through all senses and feelings	10
3.3 Safety and fear	11
3.4 Calm and elation	11
3.5 Nature as work and livelihood	12
3.6 Special features of the Finnish relationship with nature	13
3.7 Tensions within the concept of nature	14
4 What prevents us from stopping biodiversity loss?	16
4.1 Accelerating decline in biodiversity	16
4.2 A society of greed and overconsumption	16
4.3 The pitfalls of confrontation	17
4.4 Consequences of local and global inequality	18
4.5 Lack of systems understanding and visions	19
4.6 Lack of leverage	20
5 What makes halting biodiversity loss possible?	22
5.1 A rich relationship with nature throughout life	22
5.2 Everyday choices	23
5.3 Making a difference together	23
5.4 Researched information and sustained efforts	24
5.5 Popularising knowledge and using art to increase understanding	25
5.6 Finland as a pioneer even in the midst of crises	26
5.7 Further constructive nature dialogues needed	27
6 Conversation triggers for future nature dialogues	30
About the authors	32

Preface

Biodiversity is emerging alongside the climate crisis as a major discussion topic concerning the future of humanity. And rightly so, as we all depend on nature for our well-being, economy and entire society.

Biodiversity is declining at an alarming rate globally, including in Finland. We need to reverse this trajectory. To support this work, Sitra and Dialogue Academy invited people in Finland to the Great Nature Dialogue, a constructive discussion on the significance of nature and halting biodiversity loss. The dialogues were met with enthusiasm: more than 100 dialogues were held at scores of locations in March 2022.

This report brings together the key observations made in the nature dialogues of the spring. The summary also lays the groundwork for Sitra's Nature-wise Finland 2035 vision. The vision, to be published later in 2022, is a realistic and positive future vision of Finland, where biodiversity loss has been stopped through co-operation.

The debate around biodiversity may often be quite heated. This is partly because nature is very important to people, businesses or even municipalities, but often for different reasons. The Great Nature Dialogue, conducted using the Timeout dialogue method, gave people an opportunity to reflect on and articulate their own relationship with nature and to listen to others' perceptions of nature.

The summary of the Great Nature Dialogue emphasises both the wide range of our different relationships with nature and the need to reconcile them. In the nature-wise Finland of the future, the different relationships with nature are not mutually exclusive but complementary. We must be able to see that nature is valuable in its own right, important for mental well-being and a major source of livelihood. All of this at the same time.

To support the current debate, negotiation, persuasion and mediation we need genuine constructive discussion – dialogue. It helps us to put ourselves in each other's position and teaches us to listen to others, thereby building the trust and understanding we need to work together. The better we understand the different nature relationships of Finnish people, the easier it will be for us to find widely accepted solutions and tackle biodiversity loss together. When people meet, new ideas are also born for practical solutions to stop biodiversity loss.

We hope that the summary of the Great Nature Dialogue will inspire us all to continue our discussions about nature in our own communities. We should also talk about nature in our homes and among our friends, and the discussion should be processed into road maps to a sustainable everyday life. Businesses and different industries must also discuss nature and act for the good of nature. Safeguarding biodiversity should be included at the heart of strategies – the basis for action.

Dialogue is essential, but it is not enough on its own. It must encourage action and innovations. We must build change together for the benefit of our nature and the Finnish people. We must move towards a shared wisdom about nature.

Helsinki, 25 May 2022

Mari Pantsar
Director,
Sustainability solutions

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Summary

The Great Nature Dialogue held in March 2022 discussed nature, its importance and how to stop the loss of biodiversity. The summary of the discussions provides a comprehensive overview of the content and key perspectives of the dialogues. About 800 people took part in the 103 dialogues held in different communities across Finland. The discussions were mainly conducted using the [Timeout method](#).

The aim of the Great Nature Dialogue, organised by Sitra and The Dialogue Academy, was to better understand Finns' varied relationships with nature and to stimulate discussion on the importance of nature. The summary of the discussions lays a foundation for Sitra's [Nature-wise Finland 2035 \(link in Finnish\)](#) vision, which is intended to be a realistic picture of a nature-positive Finland – a country where the degradation of nature has been stopped through cooperation. The vision is due to be published later this year.

The people who participated in the dialogue spoke about nature in a rich and nuanced way, their observations, thoughts and feelings reflecting the whole spectrum of human experience. The discussants felt that nature is a central part of people's life in Finland. It also became apparent that people have very different relationships with nature.

The loss of biodiversity was considered from many different points of view, ranging from everyday observations on the decline of biological diversity to planetary-scale ecology. The main themes of the discussions were the formation of the Finnish relationship with nature and the factors that prevent biodiversity loss and enable stopping it.

The Finnish relationship with nature was discussed in terms of senses and feelings, experiences of security and fear, calm and rapture, and work and livelihood. Participants felt that the obstacles to preventing the loss of nature include the accelerating decline in biodiversity, society being based on greed and overconsumption, confrontations, the consequences of local and global inequalities, and a lack of systemic understanding, vision and empowerment. At the same time, the participants believe that the loss of biodiversity could be stopped by fostering a rich relationship with nature throughout people's lives, making conscious everyday choices, promoting long-term research and advocacy, popularising knowledge and creating art. Many of the participants hoped that Finland would lead the way in stopping the loss of biodiversity, even in a time of crisis.

The Great Nature Dialogue makes it clear that we all have various parallel, sometimes even strained, relationships with nature. These relationships evolve as our experiences, conditions, life situations and understanding change. The dialogues increased the discussants' appreciation of the importance of biodiversity, the factors contributing to biodiversity loss and of other people's different perspectives and experiences. They also gave the participants an opportunity to articulate their relationships with nature in ways and forms that support their own agency. The dialogues were seen as an important and novel way to act together to safeguard biodiversity.

The better we understand the different relationships people have with nature and how these relationships contribute to their willingness to act, the better chance we have of working together to stop biodiversity loss. Dialogue that builds understanding and trust is needed at all levels of society, from local communities to global decision-making, if we are to succeed in halting biodiversity loss.

1 Introduction

The Great Nature Dialogue discussed nature, its importance and how to stop the loss of biodiversity. The aim of the 103 dialogues, held in different communities across Finland, was to better understand Finns' diverse relationships with nature. In what ways is nature meaningful to people and communities? What enables us to safeguard biodiversity and what prevents us from stopping biodiversity loss? What would make individuals, communities, organisations or decision-makers enthusiastic about a nature-wise Finland?

The Great Nature Dialogue is part of Sitra's vision work for a [Nature-wise Finland 2035](#). The vision is meant to be a realistic picture of a nature-positive Finland – a country that has managed to halt the loss of biodiversity through co-operation.

This summary provides a broad overview of the contents and key aspects of the Great

Nature Dialogue. The dialogues involved a wide range of people, from children to the elderly and from urbanites to those living in rural areas, reflecting on their relationship with nature. Professionals and experts from different sectors, as well as those involved in agriculture, forestry and tourism were also present. The summary deepens the results of a previous Sitra [survey](#) on Finns' relationships with nature, which found that 87 per cent of Finns consider nature important to themselves although attitudes, thoughts and actions towards nature vary. Through the participants' experiences, the summary also ties in with the reflections on how our relationships with nature and different conceptions of it contribute to solving the ecological sustainability crisis in the publication [Ihminen osana elonkirjoa](#) (in Finnish).

Dialogues on nature

Dialogue refers to a specific discussion method aimed at increasing the understanding of the topic of the discussion, of other people and of oneself. Dialogue explores the meaning of things through people's different experiences. In a dialogue, all points of view and experiences are valuable in building a better understanding.

The Great Nature Dialogue was aimed at creating a rich dialogue on the discussants' diverse nature relationships and a new understanding of how the different nature relationships contribute to halting biodiversity loss.

Making room for dialogue is particularly important when there are social challenges and tense situations. Constructive discussion and respectful encounters with others reinforce trust and equality, laying a basis for solving challenges together. A dialogue that reinforces understanding and trust is also needed at all levels of society, from local communities to global decision-making, to halt biodiversity loss.

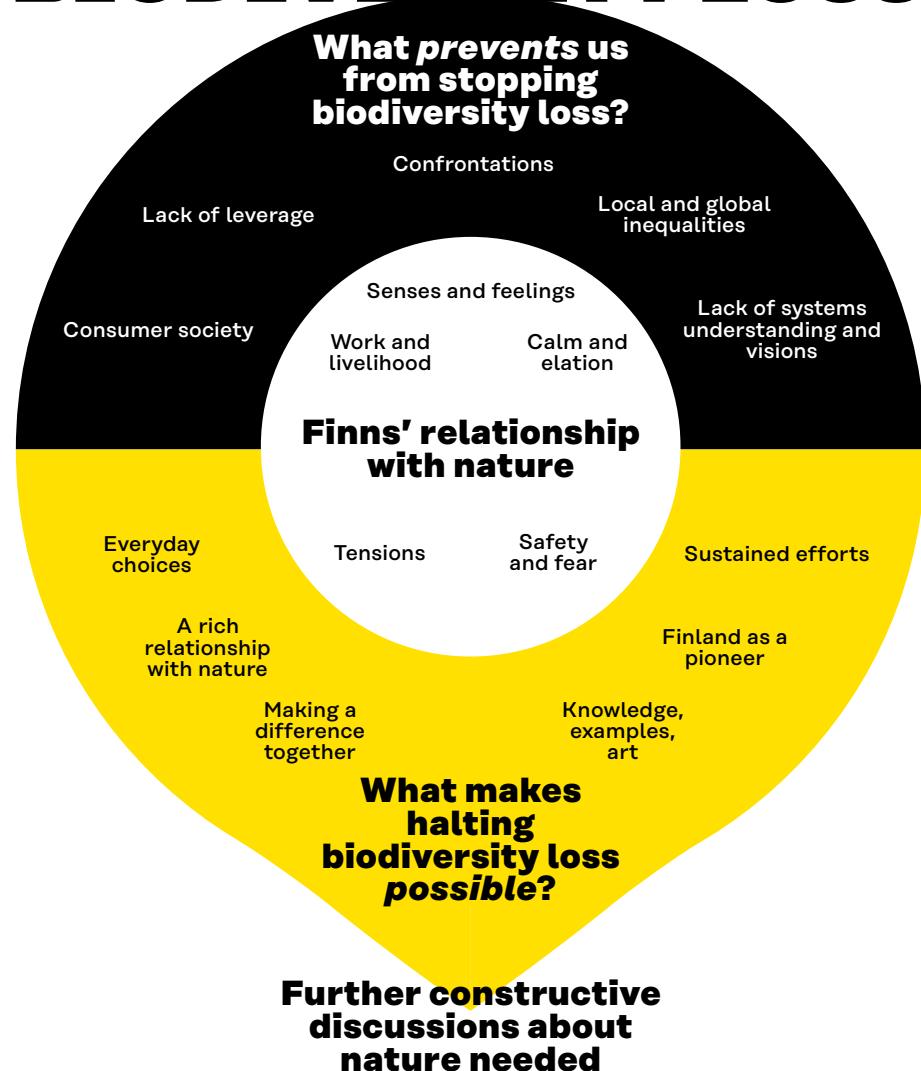
The perspective of the Great Nature Dialogue was especially focused on the “Finnish relationship with nature”, which led the participants to talk about nature from a local rather than a global or planetary point of view. Our summary of the Great Nature Dialogue discussions highlights the richness and diversity of the relationship Finnish people have with nature. It would be tempting to try to typify the discussions and participants according to the way in which the relationship with nature is constructed, for example, in the discourse of young and older people, in urban and rural areas, or in different industries and professions. But this would not do justice to the richness of the individual dialogues and the deeper under-

standing that took place during the dialogues.

The dialogues make it perceptible that different, sometimes tense relationships with nature coexist within individuals. The material from the dialogues also shows that relationships with nature are changing and taking new, as yet unstructured forms. A person may simultaneously talk of nature as intrinsically valuable and as a resource to be taken advantage of. The relationship with nature may be practical, but at the same time it may have even mystical dimensions. Equally, many of us feel both hopelessness and hopefulness in the face of biodiversity loss. In our relationship with nature, we are both takers and givers.

Figure 1. Main themes of the Great Nature Dialogue

BIODIVERSITY LOSS



In the discussions of the Great Nature Dialogue, the participants seek ways of articulating their own experience and relationship with nature, while also challenging notions and concepts about nature. Nature is framed in many different ways in the discourse of the participants. At its broadest, nature is seen as a circle of life to which we humans belong, and biodiversity loss is the threatening heritage that we will leave to future generations. What emerges from the dialogues is people's desire to look for such verbalisations and forms for their relationship with nature that support their own agency. In this way our own roles and responsibilities in the circle of life begin to take shape, and the gaps in our own and collective understanding become more evident. In the light of the diversity, internal tension and malleability of the meanings

nature has, it can be said that there is a genuine need in Finland for a new vision for the nation's relationship with nature, in which the various relationships with nature are placed in a more meaningful context. A dialogue that increases understanding plays an important role in creating this vision.

The summary is structured as follows: the part following this introduction presents background information about the discussions in the Great Nature Dialogue, their organisers and the participants. The following sections are based on the material from the dialogues and describe the nature relationships of Finns, the many meanings they attach to nature and factors that prevent and enable biodiversity loss to be halted. The final section compiles the outcomes of the nature dialogues and outlines possible further steps.

Biodiversity and biodiversity loss

Biodiversity refers to the diversity of the living nature. This includes all living things on Earth: animals, plants, fungi and microbes. Biodiversity can be considered in terms of species, natural habitats, living environments and genetic diversity.

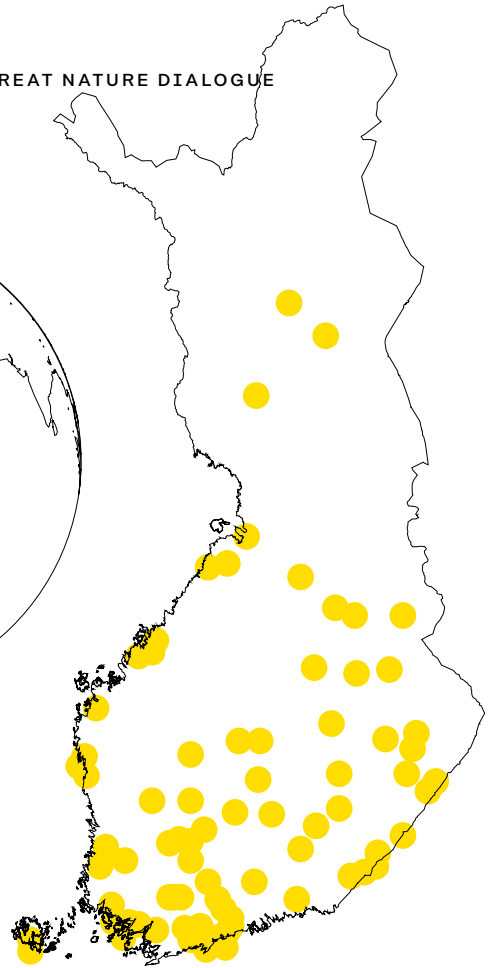
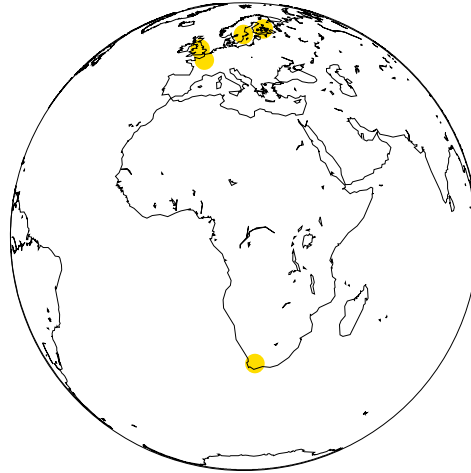
Biodiversity loss means a decline in biodiversity at an unprecedented rate. Species numbers are declining, the number of individuals of many species is falling and habitats are shrinking and becoming scattered. At the same time, genetic diversity is also declining. The main drivers of biodiversity loss are changes in land and marine use (such as converting pristine areas to cultivation), direct exploitation of species (such as overfishing), global warming, pollutants and invasive species.

2 Data: Discussions of the Great Nature Dialogue

5

DISCUSSION PARTICIPANTS WERE FROM 5 COUNTRIES

Belgium, Finland, South Africa, Sweden, and the United Kingdom



82

AND FROM 82 LOCALITIES

Brussels
Cape Town
Espoo
Eurajoki
Forssa
Gothenburg
Iisalmi
Imatra
Helsinki
Hyvinkää
Hämeenlinna
Joensuu

Jokioinen
Joutsa
Joutseno
Juva
Jyväskylä
Jämsä
Järvenpää
Kajaani
Kangasala
Kaskinen
Kerava
Kirkkonummi

Kitee
Kokemäki
Kokkola
Kontiolahti
Kristiinankaupunki
Kruunupy
Kuhmo
Kuopio
Lahti
Lappeenranta
Lieto
Lohja

London
Mariehamn
Mikkeli
Myllykoski
Mynämäki
Mäntyharju
Naantali
Nokia
Nurmes
Närpiö
Oulu
Outokumpu
Paimio
Parainen
Parikkala
Parkano
Pelkosenniemi
Pietarsaari
Piikkiö
Raahe
Rautavaara
Riihimäki

Rovaniemi
Ruokolahti
Ruovesi
Rääkkylä
Saarijärvi
Salo
Saukkola
Siikajoki
Sodankylä
Tammela
Tampere
Tohmajärvi

Turku
Ulvila
Vaala
Vaasa
Valkeakoski
Vantaa
Varkaus
Vehkalahti
Vihti
Vuokatti
Ähtäri
Äänekoski

103

103 DISCUSSIONS

~800

ABOUT 800 PARTICIPANTS

50%

50% OF THE DISCUSSIONS HAD PARTICIPANTS WHO TOOK PART IN A DISCUSSION ABOUT NATURE FOR THE FIRST TIME

95%

95% OF THE ORGANISERS FIND THAT THERE IS A NEED FOR NATURE DIALOGUES ALSO IN FUTURE

PARTICIPANTS

PARTICIPANTS INCLUDED:

agricultural graduates, activist grandmothers, adventure and outdoors educators, amanuenses, artists, assistants, biologists, childminders, clerical workers, coders, communication professionals, construction professionals, cooks, cottage dwellers, culture professionals, decision-makers, design managers, designers, dog lovers, employees from tourism, employees of municipalities and cities, employees of NGOs, engineers, entrepreneurs and representatives of companies, environment managers, environmental activists, environmental consultants, environmental designers, environmental specialists, executive directors, experts by experience, experts from energy industry, experts of biodiversity and climate, farmers, financial managers, forest managers, forest owners, forestry professionals, general directors, general upper secondary students, geographic data specialists, grandparents, heads of administration, heads of citizen communication, heads of development, heads of international affairs, holders of bachelor's degree in hospitality management, illustrators, immigrants, innovation leaders, investment specialists, IT consultants, joiners, landscape planning professionals, leaders of projects, media artists, members of Christian Democratic Youth, members of Finnish Centre Youth, members of Left Youth Finland, military

professionals, MPs, municipal counsellors, museum professionals, musicians, nature enthusiasts, nature protection activists, nature protection managers, nature reporters, NGO activists, parents, parsons, pensioners, philosophers, photographers, physical activity enthusiasts, physicians, priests, product designers, product development managers, professional board members, professionals of land use planning, professors, programme directors, project managers, public officials, RDI specialists, research directors, researchers and doctors of different fields, residents of blocks of flats, responsibility and impact specialists, rural developers, rural entrepreneurs, Russian-speaking senior women, school coaches, schoolchildren, scouts, service designers, specialists of development work, students of different fields, sustainability managers, teachers, teaching coordinators, tourism entrepreneurs, trainees, trainers, transport coordinators, unemployed persons, university lecturers, veterinarians, village developers, visual artists, voluntary workers, well-being professionals, writers, young biodiversity influencers, young people from the countryside, young people with a background in child welfare substitute care, youth council members, youth members of the Greens

95 ORGANISERS

95 ORGANISERS WHO RETURNED THEIR DIALOGUE RECORDINGS

SCIENCE, RESEARCH AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

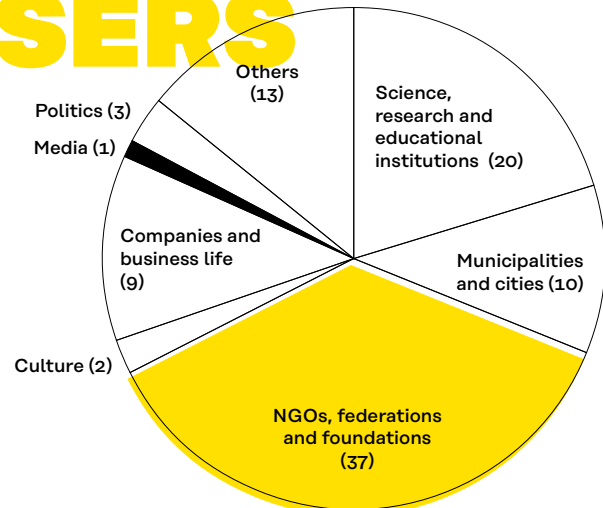
Aalto University, Anna Heikkinen (Tampere University), Arctic Centre (University of Lapland), Bildningsalliansen and Svenska folkskolans vänner, Demos Helsinki, Environmental Committee of the Student Body of the University of Helsinki, Finnish expert panel for sustainable development and Finnish Environment Institute (SYKE) and Nuorten Agenda 2030, Going Green Oy, Kudelma, Lahti University Campus, Mikko Jalas and Meeri Karvinen (Aalto University), Savonia University of Applied Sciences and Metsäkartano Youth Centre, a school coach and teacher of the Finnish International School of Tampere, Statistics Finland, TAMK Proakatemia, teachers of a hiking course, University of Oulu, Vantaa Vocational College Varia, VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland, Vuoksenniska school centre

MUNICIPALITIES AND CITIES

City of Imatra: Eräpöhinää project, City of Lahti, City of Lappeenranta, City of Mikkeli public utility Otavia, City of Tampere: Climate and environmental policy unit and PultsuMultsu programme for suburbs, City of Turku, Council of Tampere Region, Jakobstad Region Development Company Concordia, Lappeenranta Region Environment Office and Greenreality services (City of Lappeenranta), Valonia (Regional Council of Southwest Finland)

NGO'S, FEDERATIONS AND FOUNDATIONS

Aktivistimutot movement, Association for Rural Culture and Education, Association of the Finnish Lions Clubs: N circle, Association of the Finnish Lions Clubs: working group Lions for clean water and Otaniemi general upper secondary school, Baltic Sea Action Group, Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners (MTK), Citizen's Forum, Cultura foundation, Deaconess Foundation: Kallio D-station, Deaconess Foundation: Kannelmäki D-station, Deaconess Foundation: Kontula D-station, Elonkierron Ystävät ry, Elonkipinä project of the Häme district of the Finnish Nature League and City of Tampere Unit for climate and environment and Tampere classical upper secondary school, Elonkipinä project of the Häme district of the Finnish Nature League and Tarja Tuholan and Tredu Mediapolis, Finland's Operation Libero, Finlands Svenska Marthaförbund, Finnish Aeronautical Association, Finnish Allergy, Skin and Asthma Federation, Finnish Federation of the Visually Impaired, Finnish Forest Association, Finnish Pensioners' Federation, Guides and Scouts of Finland, Ikävihreät ry, JEF Finland, Luontokunnat network, Mirja Väyrynen (Arctic Marathon Club), MLL Association for the rehabilitation of children and young people: activities under 'Grandparents and children to the forest!', Pesäpuu ry, Pielisen Tietäjäkeskus, Rovaniemen eläkeläiset ry, Siemenpuu Foundation, Sitra, Suomen Latu ry:



working group on sustainable development, Suomen säteilyturvay, Suomen tieyhdistys, Timeout Foundation, UN Youth of Finland

CULTURE

IHME Helsinki, Museum of Finnish Architecture and Design Museum

COMPANIES AND BUSINESS LIFE

Chemical Industry Federation of Finland, Emergenssi Oy, Finnfund, Finnish Confederation of Professionals STTK, Finnish Energy, Finnish Mining Association, Nomadi Landscape Architects, Ramboll Finland Oy, Sitowise

MEDIA

Valpas sustainable tourism and leisure media

POLITICS

Environmental network of the National Coalition Party, Finnish Centre Youth, Ministry of Finance: Open government

OTHER SOCIAL ACTORS, NETWORKS AND PRIVATE INDIVIDUALS

3MC – Nordic Mountain Cattle project, Aleksi Lumme, Carbon-neutral Lauttasaari 2030 project, Evangelical Lutheran parishes in Tampere and Sääksmäki parish, InnoOk co-operative and Sustainable Kajonharju project, Karhun Talo, Korkeasaari Zoo, Landscape services of the Rural Women's Advisory Organisation MKN, Nuoret biodiversiteettivaikuttajat, Nuoret ja ympäristötunteeet project, Omställning Österbotten rf, Our Forest working group, Volunteers of Rovaniemi Neuvokas

3 The many meanings of nature and Finns' relationship with nature

3.1 What is Finnish nature made of?

The people who participated in the dialogue speak about nature in a way that is rich and nuanced. The discussion material is full of sometimes even poetic expressions, with which the participants describe their relationship to different natural environments. In the participants' discourse, nature emerges primarily as different places, but also as living and non-living creatures. This diversity of the different dimensions of nature reflects the whole spectrum of human experience, with its varying perceptions, thoughts and feelings.

When the participants talk about nature, they mainly talk about the forest, the sea, lake landscapes and the fells. Nature also refers to storms, sunrises, a starry sky and the seasons: *'Nature is completely different depending on the season'*. The relationship of Finns and the forest emerges strongly in the discussions: *'There are so many ways of thinking about nature. I associate it with forests. Most of Finland is forests, and I grew up among the forests'*. Many participants recall childhood games and the paths in the forests: *'I still remember a forest path I took with my dog when I was six years old'*. For many, the forest also means *'food, berries, game, a warm house in the winter when you heat it with wood from your own forest'*. In some of the dialogues, the forest has spiritual and religious associations. One participant says *'I don't go to the cemetery, I reminisce people in nature, which is where I reflect on things more deeply anyway'*. Another participant summarises the experience of silence and holiness which were associated with the

forest in many of the discussions: *'The forest is home and church.'*

"The forest is home and church."

For many of the participants, rocks, the surrounding nature and parks on the way to school or work are meaningful places in their life. The traditional rural landscape and the environment of their own summer cottage (*'mökki'*) were also part of the nature they found important. In addition, the specificity of urban nature was emphasised in several discussions: *'I find urban nature different from rural forests'*. Some of the participants think urban forests may even be more diverse than the commercial rural forest. One participant notes that *'an urban forest is no worse than a forest in the countryside. I guess you can't judge them, it's probably your own experience of nature, where you can get it and what's accessible.'*

On several occasions, the emphasis was on activities in nature. Outdoor activities include: picking berries and mushrooms, taking photographs, fishing and hunting, as well as being on trails, ski tracks, ski slopes, water and in the air. *'I ski, I'm alive when I'm touched by the forces of nature'*, says a participant describing being in nature. *'Sunshine, the smell of wood resin, the smell of freshness, frisbee golf'*; is how another participant depicts being active in nature. Today, nature can also be experienced virtually: *'The virtual world enables us to get below the surface and into the forest environment'*. For example, people with reduced mobility *'can experience nature, which was not possible before'*.

For some, nature also means work, livelihoods, economy and income. For those involved in agriculture and forestry, those living in rural areas and some of the experts, nature is a constant presence in everyday life. *'Living in rural or sparsely populated areas, nature is more a part of everyday life, it's not like going out into nature, it's more like looking after a garden, it's not a special thing, it's everyday life.'* The forest in particular is characterised as the *'foundation of the national economy'*. Forestry has an impact on people's experience of nature. One of the participants says that *'although I have grown up in the countryside, nature has been fields of trees and strongly modified by people. The diversity of species has been poor.'*

Plants and animals are an integral part of nature to the participants. Forest trees that provide shelter are mentioned in many dialogues. The wolf and the bear also live in the forest, while foxes are found in a variety of environments. Participants also talk about deer, squirrels, rats and urban rabbits. Birds are observed and the changes in their habitat are discussed. Perch, pike and salmon represent subaquatic nature. The relationship with many living creatures is twofold: butterflies and pollinators are delightful, whereas ticks, mosquitoes and deer flies are a nuisance. Co-existence with other organisms has made some of the participants question how far insects and ticks must be tolerated and whether people have a right to destroy them.

In almost all dialogues, nature was also considered from the point of view of the impact of human activities. The participants felt that dangerous or annoying encounters with wild animals are partly the result of human activity: *'What is human responsibility? If we have to restrict our own activities because there might be a wolf somewhere, how do we deal with the fact that we are responsible for the huge increase in the number of deer and so predators have come close.'* Some find species such as barnacle geese, which have settled in towns and cities, irritating: *'The damn barnacle geese have found their way*

here again. The entire yoga pier is covered in goose shit. I'm ready to pull the trigger myself.' But even with geese, the participants suspect that *'it's the fault of people, something wrong was done somewhere to make them come here.'*

3.2 Nature through all senses and feelings

The dialogues contained a lot of talk about sensory experiences in nature and the feelings and impressions linked to them. At the same time, the strong sensual and embodied relationship Finns have with the nature surrounding them is revealed. Nature is associated with different sounds and silence, many smells and odours, darkness and light. In nature *'You can feel both the smells and the sounds in the soles of your feet'*. Sunsets, leaves growing, and the flowers blooming are described as *'aesthetic experiences'*. Nature can be a complex aesthetic experience that combines what we hear, touch, smell and taste as experiences felt in the body and mind.

Through the senses, nature affects the mental landscape of the participants in many ways. *'Nature is always visible, for example, on the way to school, even if you don't think about it, and it helps with stress,'* says one of the participants. Another explains how *'my mental state depends very much on nature and, for example, on the weather. If the sun shines, my mental state is much more positive than when it rains.'* For some, *'nature is an empowering place'*, for others *'a place for sorrow, joy and other feelings'*. *'Nature has created strong memories and emotional ties,'* sums up one participant.

Nature is sensed in different ways, alone and with others. Some of the participants can feel nature at its strongest precisely when alone: *'The serenity you get from a sunset on the beach if you are alone.'* To others, sharing a nature experience with others, for example with children, makes it special.

Several participants in the dialogue said they think the basis for a relationship with nature is established in childhood. Reflecting on this point from a contemporary perspective also raises concerns: *‘With today’s children in the social media society, the relationship with nature does not develop in the same way’*. The dialogues also highlight that the relationship with nature is alive and also often changes throughout life: *‘I only became close to nature 20 years ago when I met a friend who had been involved with nature since childhood’*. The participants describe how *‘I have learnt to love nature over time as I have got older’*.

Although the participants mainly feel positive about nature, not all feelings about nature are unambiguously positive. A strong connection with nature can also evoke anxiety and guilt: *‘How do I feel bad about eating steak?’* Your own relationship with nature may also affect how you appear to others. One of the participants describes feeling *‘ashamed in front of my godchildren because of my inability to solve challenges related to nature’*.

“ I feel ashamed in front of my godchildren because of my inability to solve challenges related to nature.”

3.3 Safety and fear

For many participants, nature feels like a refuge: *‘When I was a kid, expecting a punishment the forest was a place of safety.’* In difficult life situations, *‘nature has been perhaps the only refuge, no one has listened or watched, you felt free.’* When your own mind is in crisis, you can seek relief in nature activities. Finns also resort to nature in social crises, in both past and future ones. *‘If a war broke out, some people would hide in the*

forests. Finns have always hidden in the forest during different crises.’

Some dialogue participants also say nature arouses fears. One person is frightened by *‘the forest, which is pitch dark and you cannot even really move about there’* and *‘there is a fear of dangers in the wild, such as bears’*. The relationship with nature of some participants in turn is characterised by the negative experiences they have had in nature: *‘I hate forests! After military service, I don’t want to go to a forest again voluntarily. It’s like an overdose, I don’t want to go to a forest. It’s the worst’*. Some also fear the wilderness, the Northern Lights and the threat of drowning when near water.

The natural environments modified by human culture also evoke fears in people, the most typical example being going to an outside toilet at night. One of the participants had been at a summer cottage with friends, the *‘the group was terrified. They didn’t dare to go to the toilet on their own at night’*. The imagination begins to run wild in the dark forest or the garden of the summer house: *‘It’ must be the imagination that goes wild. Damn, there’s a bear right behind me...I’m sure of it...or a murderer or something.’*

3.4 Calm and elation

“ Nature is like a friend who is with you always and everywhere.”

One participant describes nature as *‘like a friend who is with you always and everywhere, and when I’m in nature I’m never alone. It’s a place where I can recharge myself, calm down and gather energy’*. For many, nature is *‘a place of calm’*. *‘Going to a forest resets your thoughts’*. One participant describes how *‘nature grounds you and superficiality and schedules feel pointless’*.

Another summarises the shared experiences: *'There's no sense of urgency in the forest and perhaps that is why I feel accepted there. The forest does not demand anything from me.'*

The experience of nature is associated with powerful existential experiences and being part of an entity larger than human-kind. *'You look for moments of elation in nature,'* is how one participant characterises their relationship with nature. *'I never cease to be amazed by the cycle of the seasons,'* says another. When admiring the starry sky, people realise the human scale and the universe: *'How can the world be so enormous. It is somehow very touching and thought-provoking as an experience'.* Mysticism is also related to nature as we encounter things in nature that we cannot explain: *'We think we know things and what happens in nature,'* although many things are still *'shrouded in mystery'.*

Nature is also a source of creativity and inspiration: *'for all artists, nature has provided an awful lot of inspiration.'* A participant describes how *'when you look at a forest and see the trees and animals, you get so much in your head that you start coming up with great ideas for horror films and games and cartoons and stuff like that.'*

In nature, the past and the future are present at the same time. The participants describe how the experience of nature enable us to understand how *'nature is part of us,'* and *'that I have become part of nature myself, I am not an external observer, I have found my place in the ecosystem'.* Many dialogues say that *'there would be no life without nature'.* At the same time, there is a yearning for a return to *'respect and the sanctity of nature'.* This way, nature could continue to

be *'sacred,' 'an embrace'* and *'the cradle of life'* also in the future.

3.5 Nature as work and livelihood

Some participants have *'professional relationship with nature'.* This means that their work is in one way or another linked with nature, for example, in forestry, agriculture, road maintenance, tourism, research, education and training, statistics, urban planning or architecture. For many in these professions, nature *'means a livelihood, I see it as a job. I rarely leave my garden for nature without it being linked to work. In summer, I pick cloudberries and sell them. The reindeer are now in the yard, we go and gather beard moss.'*

The most professionally oriented talk about nature was in relation to agriculture and forestry. Farmers are described in one dialogue as *'preservers of the intergenerational dimension of nature'.* One participant describes how, as a farmer, they have a *'love-hate relationship with nature'.* *'Nature is sometimes wonderful, sometimes awful,'* says another participant. *'At times, it's very difficult with invasive species because they obtrude everywhere.'* Wild animals may also *'make it difficult to make a living'.*

However, maintaining biodiversity, nutrient circulation and security of supply are important values for most of the farmers who participated in the discussions, though they worry about the over-fertilisation and the chemicalisation of agriculture: *'The use of pesticides undermines the function of bugs, which affects the rest of the biota.'* The participants mull over the point that *'if nature is in*

" I rarely leave my garden for nature without it being linked to work."

a bad shape the livelihood and the economy suffers, everything stalls, and the wheels stop turning. So taking care of nature also preserves or improves the preconditions for one's own livelihood. *'Let's make a deal like this: we give to nature and are allowed to farm,*' proposes one farmer.

For forest owners, the forest is both an investment and a source of income, as well as a responsibility for the well-being of the forest and its species living. *'The existence, growth and use of the forest creates jobs and prosperity outside the forestry sector, because it's so important as an export industry,*' says a participant who works in forestry. Sustainable use of forests was on the minds of many forest owners. Participants reflect on the power relations related to the commercial use of forests and the role of forest owners, lobbyists and industry in sustainable forestry. *'We cannot live without using natural resources, but how far can we go? And how can these be combined so that both prosper?'* people ask in several discussions.

3.6 Special features of the Finnish relationship with nature

" Finns have a close relationship with nature. Many have a summer cottage where they can relax, and although we are very close to nature, we don't often stop to think about what nature means."

The dialogues highlight a firm belief that nature is a central part of people's lives in Finland and belongs to everyone in some way. But there is an awareness that people have different relationships with our shared nature. In addition to professions and places

to live, there are matters such as the historical imagery, the challenges of the present and the threats of the future that also define Finns' relationship with nature.

The countryside and the forest have a strong presence in the cultural imagery of Finnishness: *'Hay on hay poles is a strong, nostalgic image at the core of Finnishness.'* For one participant, their grandfather *'is the symbol of a Finnish man, when there was work in the fields, work with the cattle and forestry work was what he liked most. A grumpy grandfather went off to the forest, but a serene one returned home from it.'* The forests have treated the soul of Finns both in history and today. Our relationship with nature is therefore still characterised by our relationship with the forest, which *'we experience as a safe environment, while an American friend had found it a frightening environment'*.

In the discussions, the freedom to roam (*'jokamiehenoikeudet'*, everyman's rights) is considered a special value linked to Finnish nature. Picking berries and mushrooming are described as being part of Finnish heritage. People may even be jealous about their best nature spots and excellent berry places. At the same time, there is also a feeling of inferiority because *'I am not a good nature lover, I don't know all the bird species and I'm bad at identifying mushrooms and insects.'*

In the view of some, the Finnish relationship with nature has eroded. *'Not so long ago, the relationship with nature was different in Finland. People picked berries and gathered medicinal plants. Now we have become disconnected from nature and have to relearn. A wild thought occurs: how did we lose it so quickly?'* One of the participants thinks that *'city life has definitely affected both their own relationship with nature and that of their friends. Relaxing is more about watching Netflix than, say, walking in the forest'*. Generational differences in attitudes towards nature are particularly debated: *'Today's children think that food comes from the shop. Their grandparents have themselves seen how a pig*

was slaughtered and the blood was used for to make blood pancakes in the evening. Or how the flour was milled from their own grain.'

Some have also noticed that their fellow humans no longer know what to do in nature. Littering, in particular, irritates the discussants. Many think that is particularly the cleanliness and tidiness that characterises Finnish nature. Littering, on the other hand, shows a lack of concern. At the same time, tidiness can be interpreted in many different ways: thickets, bushes and long grass do not always look tidy, but are an important part of biodiversity. Trees that have been left to rot in the immediate environment may prompt complaints, *'even though that is the very idea and benefit – that trees decay'*.

The participants envisage Finland being able to act as a global example in valuing nature. But the assumption that being Finnish means being particularly nature-friendly is disturbing to some: *'As Finns, we think that Finland is a land of forests. But I feel that the image we are given of the condition of our forests is misleading. Of course, Finnish people love forests, but we also abuse them in a horrific way.'* The participants say that *'a Finn wants to co-operate with nature and do good, but people have different views of what is good.'*

The Finnish relationship with nature thus draws on history, lives in the present and probes towards the future. It is at once aesthetic and practical. Nature is lived and experienced with all the senses, in the forest, in the countryside and in the cities alike. It soothes, inspires and even frightens people. At the same time, nature is an almost self-evidently present in everyday work, livelihoods and hobbies: *'Finns have a close relationship*

with nature. Many have a summer cottage where they can relax, and although we are very close to nature, we don't often stop to think about what nature means.'

3.7 Tensions within the concept of nature

The Great Nature Dialogue discussions illustrate that the perceptions of nature are self-evident on the one hand, but also have internally tense. At the core of the tensions are questions of whether nature is an intrinsic value or a resource that people can exploit without limits. This is linked to a wider question: are we part of nature or separate from it? Few participants seem to have a clear answer to these big questions. For some, it is obvious that nature does not need humans for anything. For others, nature manifests itself particularly in terms of the experiences it offers and the resources that can be used. *'One moment I kind of buy into the argument that humans exploit nature and the next I don't,'* says a participant.

Many participants wondered how to use and protect nature at the same time. For many, *'nature is often seen through how it's used'*. Willow bushes may represent a useless thicket to one and a paradise for pollinators to another. Different natural habitats are also valued in different ways: *'I find unmanaged, original nature the finest and the most valuable.'* Another participant continues and says *'I most value the kind of clean nature that is called pristine nature – nature reserves and similar places'*. Some of the participants regret that many people's perception of the forest is of commercial forest, which are

“ One moment I kind of buy into the argument that humans exploit nature and the next I don't”

called ‘*timber fields*’ and ‘*broiler woods*’. ‘*I’m not even sure if I have seen a proper primeval forest myself*’, says one participant.

Many see the city and nature as separate, although at the same time the participants hope that ‘*nature could be even more visible in the urban landscape*’. ‘*It should be possible to experience the well-being of nature in the city without specifically having to go to nature*’, says a participant. On the other hand, the participants’ foreign friends have found it ‘*puzzling that although I live in the city, I can see a lake, forests and trees from my window*’. In the participants’ experience, even very small pieces of local nature are important places for recreation and respite, bringing nature into people’s everyday lives. Talking about the importance of urban and local nature indeed helps to dismantle the deep division between town and country.

In many dialogues, the different meanings of nature led to reflections on what we are actually talking about when we talk about nature. ‘*How do you define nature?*’ people ask in several of the discussions. ‘*Does nature begin from your doorstep, or is home also part of nature?*’ ponders one participant. Another wonders, ‘*people say they are going to nature as if it were a separate place. I try to see nature in everything and everywhere*.’ Man also ‘*manipulates nature in everything he does, breeds animals, has*

commercial forests’. Some participants would prefer to not talk about a relationship with nature but about a connection with nature that involves surrender rather than domination.

The concept of nature is thus given many meanings in the discussions. Similarly, the biodiversity loss discussed in the following chapter is reflected on in some of the discussions. Some participants remark that the loss of biodiversity seems ‘*a human-centric concept*’ as they find it ‘*difficult to see that we could destroy nature*’. In one discussion, the participants consider ‘*nature conservation rather a loaded term because the conservation concept reinforces the idea that people in the global North protect nature, which is weaker than them*’. One participant says ‘*their hackles rise when they hear the word biodiversity loss because nature is not being lost, it’s developing*.’

The potential for a nature-wise Finland also lies in these tensions. Because few people’s relationship with nature is built on clear extremes, it is possible to reinforce people’s openness to new ways of perceiving things through discussion and experiences. In some of the dialogues, a more complex understanding of the value of nature and the ways people living in different environments can contribute to halting biodiversity loss was already built up during the discussion.

“*I try to see nature in everything and everywhere.*”

4 What prevents us from stopping biodiversity loss?

4.1 Accelerating decline in biodiversity

In the discussions of the Great Nature Dialogue, biodiversity loss and its consequences were addressed from many different angles and at many different levels. Participants from different backgrounds brought with them their first-hand observations and understanding of what biodiversity loss is all about. The dialogues ranged from everyday observations on the decline of biodiversity to ecology on the planetary scale. There was concern about whether we are already too far down the road to destruction to halt biodiversity loss.

In their living environments, participants have observed that many of the animal and plant species they know from their childhood have disappeared: *'at this rate, there will not be much nature left after a few dozen years and that scares me.'* Everyone knows the situation of familiar species such as the Saimaa ringed seal, but some people are also worried about the fate of species and ecosystems that are invisible to the human eye, such as wood-decay fungi. Especially people living in the countryside said that they have noticed how traditional rural habitats are dwindling: *'for example, the traditional biotopes where animals graze on fenced and, fertilise it, the seed bank in the area grows and the natural management and cleaning is done by the animals.'*

In many discussions, biodiversity loss was also looked at on a scale larger than local

environments. This is linked to the concern that we have already allowed the loss of biodiversity to go too far, and therefore may no longer be able to stop it. Biodiversity is seen as the life insurance of ecosystems and as biodiversity is declining, many worry that the web supporting life will collapse. As one participant says: *'the image is of a desert where nothing grows.'* Many people are aware that human well-being is linked to the well-being of nature. When we destroy nature, we also destroy ourselves: *'We as humanity are making a world that is rather destructive. We do not realise it. We are going through a kind of human experiment.'*

4.2 A society of greed and overconsumption

In almost every discussion, the participants ended up asking: What causes biodiversity loss? Many participants say they think that modern man's relationship with nature is *'bad and distorted'*. Rising living standards and increasing prosperity are based on the consumption of natural resources. Although *'overconsumption is one of the reasons why nature suffers'*, who would like to give up *'the benefits gained and taken'*. One of the participants says that *'ultimately, it's human nature to always want more and better.'*

The dialogues outlined the mechanisms of a society of greed and overconsumption. The conclusion of many of the discussions was that biodiversity loss and halting it is not

"When you put nature values and economic values on the same line, the economic values often win."

an isolated issue, but is interwoven into the deep structures of contemporary societies. *'It is the individual's task to consume so that society will flourish,'* is how one discussant characterises the spirit of the times. But producing things *'quickly, in large amounts and cheaply cannot be sustainable for nature'*. A participating secondary school pupil concludes that *'biodiversity loss is caused by the economy, because we try to extract everything we can from nature'*. Another secondary school pupil notes that *'it's people's greed that prevents us from halting biodiversity loss'*. Many regret that *'when you put nature values and economic values on the same line, the economic values often win'*. Sometimes it is a very practical matter: *'As a forest owner, I have to say that it's money that decides. When the money runs out, you cut down trees.'*

In many dialogues, the participants spoke about the fact that awareness of biodiversity loss has increased significantly in recent years. Some of the participants say that people in their own communities and organisations do talk about biodiversity loss, *'but the organisational perspective is mainly the economic perspective'*. This is thought to be due to the lack of understanding in our societies of the threat of biodiversity loss. In one discussion, the problem is summed up as follows: *'In a way, overconsumption of natural resources conflicts with democracy. Western democracies are based on increasing prosperity. What will happen to democracy when we can no longer use natural resources in the same way?'*

The strong link between the factors that cause ecological damage and our current social and lifestyle patterns leads many to believe that responsibility is being shirked. Decision-makers are felt to be avoiding

taking decisions that people find undesirable and that restrict consumption. In addition, decision-makers seem to always find problems that are more acute than the environmental crisis. One of the young participants has *'heard from older generations that it's not their problem because they will be dead by the time it becomes a problem'*. The responsibility for halting biodiversity loss is shifted to the future and to the future generations by talking about raising new generations to be more aware of nature and by assuming that young people will be smarter about environmental issues.

4.3 The pitfalls of confrontation

The dialogues revealed how halting biodiversity loss is hampered by various social confrontations. Such conflicts are primarily between exploitation and protection of nature. They are particularly strong in certain business sectors, such as industry, forestry and agriculture. In the participants' view, they are fueled by the absoluteness of the views expressed by the different sides. Some of these different sides participated in the Great Nature Dialogue and so the confrontations were seen from various perspectives in the discussions.

One main confrontation is between environmentalists and industry. A dialogue participant notes that *'people have such a different relationship to the ecological crisis and biodiversity loss. Some are more protective and others are more dominant and promote destruction.'* Another participant is worried that *'those who do not promote the prevention of biodiversity loss have so much power and say in matters and they can do so*

" I should not experience climate anxiety because I am a farmer's child."

in their paid work. A self-identified representative of commercial interests describes how *'nature is a prerequisite for life, economic life comes through nature, there would be no roads, schools or food if there were no nature'*. Another finds themselves *'always at odds with nature conservation: nature conservation is not biodiversity'*. One dialogue describes a project in which *'business reckoned that the authorities were in the pocket of environmentalists, while environmentalists wondered why the authorities were in the pocket of industry'*.

Participants employed in industry point out that *'all industrial activity leave a trace. We cannot do it without affecting biodiversity'*. They call for credible communication: *'it's not credible communication if we claim that there are no traces'*. At the same time, they describe how *'the sector is willing to do things right and well, enabling this voluntarily would be important'*, but *'everything is done through regulations, bureaucracy makes it difficult to put things into practice.'*

'The discussion about forests is like war, people dig foxholes and shoot,' is how a participant working in the forestry sector describes their experiences. *'Both the issue and the job cause anxiety when you work in an industry that's seen as the bad guy,'* continues another. A participant who works in agriculture explains how *'as someone engaged in agriculture, I've taken so much shit about being an exploiter of nature and being against nature'*. There is a strong sense of variance between town and country: *'It's easy for a person living in a block of flats to demand protection but harder for an owner to implement it if the money comes from your own wallet.'*

Discussants have found that the nature debate often emphasises extremes and *'the views in between go unheard, although they would concern the majority of people'*. In particular, top-down nature discussions are considered difficult and confrontational: *'A bottom-up approach would provide better results'*. One of the participants describes how *'farmers and forest owners do reflect on their relationship with nature. However, when*

someone from higher up comes and tells you what you must do, there is a psychological reaction to resist it'. Another participant says that *'if someone came to protect my forests, I'd definitely be pissed off'*.

There is a shared perception that *'there is a great deal of exaggeration in the discussion. There is not that much progress made when it's always a yes-no argument.'* Similarly, some believe that *'if nothing less than perfection will do, we are stuck'*. Instead, *'we would achieve the most by reflecting together on what is necessary to take into account and what is less important'*.

4.4 Consequences of local and global inequality

Some of the dialogues also focused on how economic and social inequalities slow down and prevent the halting of biodiversity loss. In the context of these themes, the conversation shifted from local challenges to broader global issues.

The dialogues pointed out that people in economically and socially variable and sometimes difficult life situations may have very different resources and opportunities to pay attention to biodiversity loss: *'I am already suffering and you want me to think about the carbon footprint? If only I could survive.'* Some of the ecological choices require *'the consumer to be relatively well off so that they can choose an electric car and so on'*.

One participant remarks that *'everyone should be worried about the empathy gap between marginalised people and the majority population, which is increasing with biodiversity loss'*. Biodiversity loss can also exacerbate tensions between population groups. The discussions also raised questions about the right of different population groups to their own culture and livelihoods, and how traditional livelihoods can strengthen nature

values on the one hand and conflict with nature conservation on the other.

Dialogues exploring global phenomena highlighted how, in an economy exploiting nature, the global North exploits the global South and how, as biodiversity loss progresses, inequality increases. The result can be continuous conflicts over natural resources, raw materials and technologies. Current global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, reveal how *'dependent we are on resources that are very unequally distributed globally'*.

The crises currently shaking the world were conspicuous in some of the dialogues. In these debates, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and war in general were described as a great environmental tragedy. War is mass destruction, also a mass destruction of nature, compared in the discussions to biodiversity loss. At the same time, acute crises such as the pandemic and the war hide environmental topics from public debate. In reality, however, one crisis does not cancel out the other: *'Although what happens in Ukraine at the moment is awful and it's important to talk about it, we must not forget the other crises that we have. For example, biodiversity loss does not suddenly stop just like that.'*

4.5 Lack of systems understanding and visions

The problems related to biodiversity loss led some of the participants to call for a better understanding of the bigger picture on the

one hand, and the creation of inspiring visions on the other. The participants describe, how *'at least in the West, man has in a way become detached from nature or is not at the mercy of nature. But at the same time, societies are more and more dependent on natural resources every day, and not enough is being done to link these things.'*

"The overall effect remains hidden when we look at just one thing."

The insights *'that we lack a holistic view'* were linked to many concrete examples. Bio-products are a good idea, but if they increase logging in forests, deforestation will persist. People avoid flying, but shipping also produces massive emissions. Climate targets and biodiversity do not always go hand in hand: for example, combating climate change by replacing non-renewable energy with wind power and hydropower may also cause loss of biodiversity. The biggest problem is that *'the overall effect remains hidden when we look at just one thing'*. It can also be *'difficult to find a common direction, everyone is pulling in their own direction'*. For example, this is visible as *'a tug-of-war'* that *'we have sectors and boundaries in government that can make it difficult to understand others, and all sectors want to have as much money as possible in their own pockets'*.

A bigger picture is also needed for navigating the future. One young participant says *'I find it difficult to believe in a positive*

"Although what happens in Ukraine at the moment is awful and it is important to talk about it, we must not forget the other crises that we have. For example, biodiversity loss does not suddenly stop just like that."

outcome regarding nature and the future because I think people will not stop destroying nature'. Another participant says 'at the moment, there are no social utopias being created right now, there is no courage to develop a whole new system and imagine a whole new world'. It is high time human beings 'came down from our pedestal and realised that we are not masters of nature, and gave up certain prerequisites for our well-being to avoid destroying this planet.'

In such a situation, it is very difficult for the discussion participants 'to predict how far we should go to change our relationship with nature in order to repair or preserve it for future generations'. Many find the future directions conflicting. One participant asks 'why people are encouraged to drive electric cars' and why 'stopping driving so that everyone would use public transport' is not talked about. Another participant notes that it is not enough to compensate for the harm caused to nature, such as by replacing forests felled to provide room for construction by planting a forest somewhere: 'It's a bit like cutting a violet and planting a daisy to replace it. Is that ok? Is that fine?' There is also a global scale to this: 'Do we want to take the biodiversity loss elsewhere or can we protect nature in Finland?'

It was noted in several dialogues that future challenges are enormous from the systemic point of view. One participant summed up the discussion on reducing consumption and compromising on material living standards: 'We must question everything we do and what we have learned to consider as part of life over the last few decades.'

4.6 Lack of leverage

People's perception of a lack of personal means of influencing matters is one of the factors slowing down the process of stopping biodiversity loss. 'The problem is not a lack of motivation but the fact that people do not think there are concrete means to do something.' The paucity of means of influencing is a similar problem. With biodiversity loss, 'the magnitude of the matters related to it is so enormous that an individual may not feel able to make much difference on the large scale. It may feel that it's easier not to do anything that supports nature or biodiversity.' Although people want to protect their nearby environment and collect litter in their surroundings, the significance of these acts in relation to the larger scale of biodiversity loss is not easy to perceive.

The role of personal choices in relation to local, national and global decision-making also troubles many: 'It's hard to begin to question my own daily activities, like hang on, am I doing something wrong? These things are regarded as activities of larger parties: states, cities, towns.' One participant says 'whenever I talk about this with my child, they say that what one person does, does not make any difference'. Despite this, the participant thinks 'that what one person does will lead to policy change, and the production methods and what and how we eat will change'.

The available means are considered to have a direct impact on people's motivation to act. The emphasis on the threats to biodiversity loss and climate change makes some of the participants reflect on 'how hopeless

" We must question everything we do and what we have learned to consider as part of life over the last few decades."

all the solutions required to halt biodiversity loss sound'. The hopelessness is also increased by the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine and the threat of the war spreading: 'why am I reading this or doing this when I may have to go to war in a year's time?'. This is why solutions to problems are needed, in other words, 'it should be possible to extend talking about nature to action'.

On the basis of the discussions, it is clear that a better systemic understanding about the relationship between the daily actions and structural changes is required to halt biodiversity loss. In a nature-wise Finland, a holistic understanding ought to be built of how the acts and choices of individuals, the practices, decision-making and legislation of communities together advance biodiversity loss or make it possible to stop it.

"The magnitude of the matters related it is so enormous that an individual may not feel able to make much difference on the large scale."

5 What makes halting biodiversity loss possible?

5.1 A rich relationship with nature throughout life

"It is said that we should begin from children. But we do not have enough time, we have to begin from both adults and children."

When discussing ways to halt biodiversity loss, the dialogues often returned to the first theme of this summary: people's relationship with nature. Many participants felt that biodiversity loss can be halted only by influencing the overall relationship people have with the natural world around them. Forests, lakes, oceans, seas, meadows, fields and rocks with their non-living and living creatures returned to the discussions. Refining our relationship with nature is not a responsibility of any certain group of people or life situation. It concerns all of us throughout our life, from childhood to old age.

Discussants hope that all children will develop a close relationship with nature from the very beginning of their lives and could have *'a touch of the soil'*. Daycare and schools play an important role in building the relationship with nature as *'schools are the places where it's easiest to reach people'*. One participant suggests that *'to maintain their relationship with nature, we should enable every Finnish child and young person to learn about*

Finnish food production and the forestry sector as part of their basic education'. Nature can be used as a classroom in which children learn and experience with others.

The relationship with nature of many of the participants dates back to childhood. One participant recalls how their relationship with nature began to develop as a child: *'I've been passionate about birdwatching since primary school, it's already more of a way of life for me than a hobby'*. Another participant *'already had a feeling in secondary school that I somehow want to work with environmental things'*. The participants believe that with experiences in nature, an appreciation for nature will grow. Ideally, a rich relationship with nature *'would be with a person throughout life, just like in childhood, and also in adulthood and during working life, but also towards the end of one's life cycle'*.

In the participants' minds, the crises in nature, society and mental health in turn are linked with the lack of connection with nature. We could follow the example of *'older generations when an environmentally friendly lifestyle was taken for granted'*. Generations working together can pass on tacit knowledge and bring old lessons and traditions to the present day. And vice versa: from a grandparent's perspective, *'grandchildren bring nature closer'*.

One of the participants remarks that *'it is said that we should begin from children. But we do not have enough time, we have to begin from both adults and children.'* Another says *'I think it would also be important to talk about educating adults'*. Participants believe that the richer the person's relationship with

nature is, the more that person also wants to protect nature. We must understand that *‘that every single breath we take is produced by nature, every single meal is provided by nature’*. The participants are aware of how *‘nature provides all the basic preconditions for life and if they do not exist, the technosystem cannot run for very long’*.

5.2 Everyday choices

For the majority of discussants, halting biodiversity loss starts from everyday actions. Many described their nature-friendly everyday choices, but they also saw remaining passive as a choice that has an impact on the kind of world we will live in.

The Great Nature Dialogue participants say they make choices in their everyday lives with the intention to contribute to conserving biodiversity. These include reducing consumption, composting and recycling, a vegetarian or vegan diet, favouring locally produced food, small-scale farming and pollinator care, preventing invasive species, cleaning up litter, saving water, reducing driving and flying, using public transport and cycling, and voting for candidates who are familiar with matters related to nature.

The participants remind us that in many cases, *‘doing nothing can also be an act supporting biodiversity’*. Everyone *‘could consider before buying something whether I really need it or whether I already have something similar in my cupboard – whether we need all the goods that we are buying, whether we can share something’*.

5.3 Making a difference together

Apart from individual actions, the desire and willingness to work together with other people was highlighted in the discussions. Working together did not appear as an alternative to individual action, but rather as an engine for new strength, understanding and enthusiasm for halting biodiversity loss. In addition to the existing forms of collective action, new ways of beginning to take action for nature were brainstormed in some of the discussions.

The participants feel that when doing things together, *‘no one has to do the whole thing themselves, everyone has a role to play’*. Doing things together also *‘appeases the lizard brain, in other words reduces resistance to change and increases knowledge’* when *‘doing things together creates a shared understanding’*. A participant describes how *‘people like to do things together and when you do things in nature together, you remember that this was nice and could be made use of in your own garden. Doing things together inspires and spreads information’*. Another participant has noticed how *‘involvement and participation are important. You are part of the solution, even in a small way it makes it easier not to be a huge lump, but to be able to act and experience a sense of community through your own actions’*.

Some of the participants say they are involved in associations and village communities and try to make a difference in their own workplaces. For example, one participant says they are involved in a local game management association, which makes

” Doing things together inspires and spreads information.”

efforts to protect biodiversity by removing invasive predators from valuable waterfowl habitats. Another spoke of being involved in their organisation's sustainability activities: *'I can act in accordance with my own values and bring them up in discussions with the entire community.'*

Doing things together is also likely to be seen from the outside as *'a good collective action, not as something ecofreaks do'*. One of the participants proposes a "Nature-Pride" as *'a visible way to show that we stand behind this and invite everyone to join in'*. It has also been noticed in government and politics that *'fundamentally, the relationship with nature crosses the boundaries of party policies in a good way. There are win-win opportunities.'*

5.4 Researched information and sustained efforts

"The interaction between species must be taken into account if we wish to understand the loss of species."

Everyday actions and collective activity were accompanied and supported by the researched information produced by numerous experts who participated in the dialogues, and their long-term efforts to both conserve biodiversity and change the social structures that accelerate biodiversity loss emerged in the discussions. They included researchers, public officials and representatives of business and various organisations.

Universities and research institutes conduct basic research and develop more sustainable food production and forest management methods. Participants engaged in research note that more basic ecological research is needed as *'the interaction between species must be taken into account if we wish*

to understand the loss of species'. Scientific research helps solve problems and set clearer targets for halting biodiversity loss. Participants working at universities also hope that universities themselves would set an example in nature-related matters and make nature themes central to teaching.

Research and statistics compile information on biodiversity loss. New expectations are placed on ecosystem accounting, in which *'habitat types, their extent, the condition of ecosystems and the ecosystem services they provide are monitored'*. In the greenhouse gas inventory, greenhouse gas emissions are calculated and the green gross domestic product makes the environmental impacts of economic growth visible. It is expected that there will be *'a desire to get more accurate and faster statistics'*. Some participants reflected on *'whether nature should somehow be tied into the economic system so that it can be given the value we currently understand it to have. If a certain matter has a value, we also want to take better care of it.'* Others want ways of modelling the health benefits of natural living environments and their impacts on healthcare and social welfare costs.

The participants pointed out that we already have plenty of research information that helps us boost carbon sequestration, improve the circulation of nutrients and promote the sustainability of agriculture and forestry. For example, spinneys in the middle of arable farmlands and other ecotones between habitats are *'extremely valuable for biodiversity'*. At the same time, *'nature protection does not necessarily mean that the forest is ignored, as different habitats require measures to be taken. For example, groves need spruces to be removed so that they will not turn into spruce stands'*. Ingenuity is also needed: *'When some of the green areas in the municipality are not managed and there is disagreement about it, it's possible to reverse the situation by saying that the municipality is promoting biodiversity'*.

Currently, there is also an increasing amount of funding and support for biodiversity: *‘Carbon sequestration and biodiversity are themes of the next funding period. There will be quite a lot of different funding available in the future’*. Marshes and water bodies are being restored and forest management methods and ecological compensations experimented with. The LEADER approach, funded by the European Union, supports local development projects that promote biodiversity and regional strategic programmes support green innovations. *‘In the future, there will definitely be more opportunities for entrepreneurs to diversify their sources of income,’* the participants predict.

Industry, road maintenance, aviation and the tourism industry are also facing and addressing issues related to biodiversity loss, and consider the impacts of their activities on nature, ways to maintain biodiversity and the development of new, more sustainable practices. The challenge is to broaden the perspective from individual projects to the entire activity: *‘Of course, when we have factories, they have perhaps mostly managed environmental matters at the unit level, but no thought has been given to it at the level of the company.’* Another participant describes how *‘for a long time, measures have been taken to promote biodiversity, but they have been individual projects, which have not been measured yet. That’s what we will do next, set clearer targets for ourselves.’*

In construction and architecture, *‘gardens and green roofs will form a green network and serve as important green corridors’* and this *‘should already be taken into account in zoning, it should be anticipated and considered in local land-use planning or even in regional planning’*. Urban planning can support *‘the desired diversity of insect species in the urban environment’* and there is a growing realisation *‘oh yes, birds should also be taken into account. Or noise that disturbs fish’*. A participant working in this sector reflects on *‘how fast the mental landscape has changed and a sense of responsibility has been*

adopted, how demanding the situation is for the designers and planners when they recognise the long-term impacts of their choices’.

Municipalities also increasingly deal with biodiversity conservation, the environmental effects of land use and transport, the opportunities of residents to influence matters concerning their nearby nature, and the development of nature sites and equal access to them. In government, on the other hand, it is considered that *‘the state is part of society in such a way that within a certain time span, the discussions in society become action programmes, at least with a change of Parliament and also in municipalities, the third sector and companies’*.

However, some experts struggle with the fact that the journey from knowledge to taking action may be slow, causing some to become *‘tired of the subject’*. Many felt more encouraged now that biodiversity loss is finally being talked about widely and more and more is constantly done to halt it. *‘We had knowledge before, too, but everything was really based on voluntary work’*, whereas *‘now these topics have made a breakthrough’* and *‘huge positive development’* has taken place.

” That’s what we will do next, set clearer objectives for ourselves.”

5.5 Popularising knowledge and using art to increase understanding

Some participants *‘are confident that when people are informed, they will change their behaviour and do things in a less detrimental way’*. On the other hand, they feel that the discussion about nature is *‘researcher-based, conducted at its own level. Research language, jargon, bureaucratic gobbledegook. A child will definitely not understand it’*. The participants would like to hear concrete examples

in the public debate: *‘The circular economy and biodiversity loss, these concepts are a bit abstract, so they could be made more concrete and linked to each other. For example, how we can learn to think about waste in a different way.’*

“ *How can we find a shared language so that everyone can join the discussion?”*

A participant says that *‘I myself have been thinking about how we could talk about biodiversity loss in a language that would be relevant to the ordinary person. So that we would increase understanding, talk clearly about what it affects.’* The same person asks, *‘how can we find a shared language so that everyone can join the discussion?’* One answer is that *‘we should not make fostering nature a science but small, easily approachable everyday acts’,* for example, *‘managing gardens in such a way that diverse habitats remain there.’* It would be important to *‘write down what a natural environmentally friendly way of life is like’* so that *‘we could see what we are doing well and what needs to be improved.’*

The relationship with nature is not just a matter of intelligence: *‘The non-intelligent world is what happens in nature and in which people move about, experience and understand the world also in other ways than with reason.’* Aside from intelligence, experience and embodiment are also an integral part of a relationship with nature. This can be achieved through art: *‘art opens up emotion. An individual does not work only with knowledge and reason, but also with emotion.’* The role of culture and art in halting biodiversity loss may be to make difficult matters visible and bring people along and together through emotions. *‘Culture helps you get under people’s skin and reach their emotions,’* describes one of the participants. One discussion also emphasised that art does not necessarily need to always deal with themes directly

linked to the ecological crisis to be able to act as a driver of change in halting biodiversity loss. Art in itself *‘is an opportunity to show other possible worlds’.*

“ *An individual does not work only with knowledge and reason, but also with emotion.”*

5.6 Finland as a pioneer even in the midst of crises

‘Each crisis is an opportunity, including for biodiversity and climate change,’ notes one participant. Another says *‘it seems that humanity needs some kind of crisis to begin to realize that consumption must be reduced’.* For example, *‘getting off fossil fuels is becoming more pressing than ever before’.* At the same time, we must be vigilant so that although we maintain the security of supply we won’t start to *‘burn wood and dig and burn peat’.*

“ *It seems that humanity needs some kind of crisis to begin to realize that consumption must be reduced.”*

In addition to being a humanitarian crisis, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is also seen as an immense environmental tragedy, but some of the participants believe that *‘the war will change our understanding of what the prerequisites for a good life are’.* As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and now as a result of the war, *‘we see things differently than a couple of weeks or a couple of months ago’* and *‘many have completely reassessed their thoughts and priorities’.* One participant reflects that *‘the situation in Ukraine may lead to big things. In the beginning, we talked*

about security leaping to the top of the list of priorities, but it may also open the door for overhauling absolutely everything and for societal changes to happen with a big bang. Perhaps there is a chance of a big bang here’.

Older participants believe that *‘young people will definitely change this direction and see nature’.* At the same time, they reflect on the fact that *‘we also have to remember that we will become ancestors. What will we be remembered for? What will we be thanked for?’* Many of the participants believe that positive moral leadership and a positive attitude *‘help more than threatening and threat scenarios’.* *‘If you feel hopeless, no one will care about anything any more,’* one of the participants illustrates. *‘Young people are confronted with very harsh realities at a very young age. Can concrete examples of what to do soften those realities?’* On the other hand, *‘guilt is also needed. It is not necessarily a negative feeling if good things follow from it. It is precisely the reason why I have not eaten meat for a quarter of a century,’* says one participant.

At a global level, the participants would like to see Finland assuming ethical leadership on issues concerning nature: *‘Some people in Finland also say that Finland is such a small country that if we take action, it will have no significance at a global level. We should remember that when we act, others will join us.’* One participant *‘dreams that wood pulp will no longer be produced in Finland for export to China, where disposable clothing is made from it for us. Instead, high-quality processed things will be made from the harvested timber in Finland.’*

Another says *‘no task is too small or too big to do, it’s important to do something and then you will find out what’s essential’.* Both big and small acts are needed: *‘We need both big and small steps: revolution and reform.’* In practice, these could be *‘both extensive legislative changes and small everyday actions in our own lives’.*

“What will we be remembered for? What will we be thanked for?”

5.7 Further constructive nature dialogues needed

The dialogues were seen as one important way to work together to conserve biodiversity and halt biodiversity loss. It was believed that such dialogues will increase all participants’ understanding of the importance of nature and of biodiversity loss and to diminish needless confrontations. However, the journey is only just beginning and the aim is to involve an even broader and more diverse group of people from different backgrounds in future discussions.

In the experience of the participants, discussions about nature *‘follow the same pattern over and over again, there is no genuine dialogue. People come to the events and say what they have already decided to say. They do not want to listen to the opinions of others.’* Many find that discussions about nature are *‘quite often exaggerated and acrimonious and confrontational. But it rarely contributes to anything. That is why dialogue is needed.’* What is also needed is *‘a wider range of conversation to broaden opinions’* and opportunities for *‘being able to change one’s opinion as information accumulates’.* *‘The issue as a whole can only be understood through discussion,’* observes a participant.

“Halting biodiversity loss requires transparency and listening.”

For many, participating in a nature dialogue has been a valuable and insightful

experience. *'Even such a small discussion with our own people was eye-opening,'* one of the participants describes the experience provided by the dialogue. Another explains how the discussion *'broadened my understanding because I realised how little I know. A lot of interesting information about forests, the forestry sector and the views of people working in the sector. I appreciate that a lot!'* One of the participants found the nature dialogue *'the most different nature discussion I have ever been to, and I don't mean it in a bad way'.* One of the participants says at the end of the discussion that they will go *'home to draw up a kind of mental map about the connection of humans with nature – it evoked a lot of ideas'.*

The organizers of the discussions also found the discussions important and inspiring: *'It's great that diversity issues are brought up in the societal debate and linked to other climate and sustainability challenges'.* Discussing nature and biodiversity loss were also seen as important also in a context where Russia had just launched an invasion of Ukraine and the war was affecting people and communities in unpredictable ways.

People also see a future need for the dialogues. *'We found the dialogue useful and will be happy to participate in similar dialogues in future, too.'* One of the organisers explains that the dialogue *'gave us the space to discuss the issue in depth and in a different way than we usually do.'* Another says: *'This is a great way to try and tap into the wisdom held by different citizens and their groups'.* The organisers generally think it important *'to hear different opinions and have this kind*

of in-depth and constructive discussion to find common ways for change'.

The organisers were keen to hear the outcomes of the other discussions and hoped that their own discussion would *'provide ideas'* for envisaging a nature-wise Finland. At the same time, they were aware that *'a discussion about a topic of this magnitude cannot be concluded in one go'.* A single discussion felt like merely *'scratching the surface'* and efforts should also be made to attract *'participants who are not familiar with the topic'.* Both the organisers and the participants want people with different starting points and with as varied backgrounds as possible to take part in the future nature discussions: *'so that they could get out and see other people's everyday realities'.* In particular, *'the decision-makers should be engaged in the discussion'.*

One of the participants describes their feelings in the following words: *'Now is the final moment to react and hope that this dialogue will highlight scientists' findings and that people will believe them.'* The participants believe that *'halting biodiversity loss requires transparency and listening'.* The opinions of other people sometimes seem more different than they really are because, for example, *'social media can exaggerate issues even when people are actually largely in agreement'.* This means that *'if you can't understand how someone you meet doesn't consider the same matters important, try to assume good things about them and think that they are motivated by some kind of positive idea and value that is important to them. That way you can find a common discourse'.*

Concrete tools provided by the Great Nature Dialogue for organising the dialogues

Would you like to organise a nature dialogue of your own?

You can use the following materials in organising the dialogue. The materials are available on [the event website of the Great Nature Dialogue](#):

- Instructions for defining the target group
- Invitation template and proposal for invitation methods and timetable
- A dialogue script with necessary guidance for facilitating the discussion.
- Information slides on biodiversity and halting biodiversity loss to be used, for example, as introductory material
- A video introduction to the discussion to guide the participants to discuss the topic in depth and from many different angles.
- Instructions for the scribe and the wording for transcription
- Links to facilitating a remote dialogue and to the Timeout tools

The organiser of the dialogue must

- Define a more specific topic
- Book the venue and any possible catering or remote dialogue platform
- Invite the participants
- Book a person who will act as the notetaker during the discussion
- Facilitate the discussion
- Summarise, as appropriate, the key themes, perspectives and insights that emerged from the discussion

6 Conversation triggers for future nature dialogues

The main themes of the Great Nature Dialogue were the formation of the Finnish relationship with nature, and the factors that prevent and enable us from halting biodiversity loss. In this summary, we have tried to give an overall picture of these themes that deepens our understanding of the diverse relationships with nature and their effects on biodiversity loss.

Our approach to structuring the summary has been data driven: the key structures and points of view have been formed on the basis of the material and on its terms. The mutual dialogue between the authors of the summary played a key role in the analysis, helping to foster the vitality and the many perspectives of the dialogues. Our analysis does not focus on detailing the internal specificities of the individual dialogues, rather we analyse our extensive material rather as ‘one big dialogue’ in which the voices of different groups and participants talk to each other. In the text, we use a large number of direct, anonymous quotations to convey the participants’ different voices, experiences and thoughts through their own words.

The qualitative material consisting of the recordings made of the 103 dialogues of the Great Nature Dialogue is a treasure trove not instantly exhausted. Sitra will continue to use these records of the discussions to draw on the rich understanding of the multiple meanings of nature and of halting biodiversity loss. The material also offers scope for further studies and analysis from different angles.

The dialogue material shows that each of us have many different relationships with nature, which evolve as our experiences, circumstances, life situations and understanding change. At the same time, people have both a practical and an aesthetic attitude to nature. As part of life, all of us both use nature and often also protect it. The better we understand these different relationships that people have with nature, the better opportunities we have to stop biodiversity loss together. Dialogue enables us to understand our own relationship with nature and that of our fellow human beings and to increase our understanding of the consequences of the choices made by individuals and communities, and the ways in which people living and working in different environments can influence matters to stop biodiversity loss.

It is therefore important to continue to organise nature dialogues. Future nature dialogues can both delve deeper into individual topics and boldly bring together people with different points of view and from different organisations. Repeated discussions build a deeper understanding of the relationship with nature of different individuals and communities and of the consequences of biodiversity loss. Sitra’s work on the vision Nature-wise Finland 2035 provides an excellent framework for the discussions, and the material drawn up by the organisers of the Great Nature Dialogue offers the tools for organising the dialogues. It is also worth using this summary both when planning the discussions and to stimulate the ideas of the participants in the dialogue. It can be read to

understand more about the diversity of relationships with nature and how they affect biodiversity loss or to find a meaningful dialogue topic for your own reference group.

The Great Nature Dialogue is also one example of national dialogues, in which matters important to people and communities are discussed in ways that strengthen their participation and creates understanding of the different challenges and opportunities in our society. As this summary shows, the participants' understanding of the importance of biodiversity, of the factors contributing to biodiversity loss, of the points of view of others and of one's own experiences increased in the dialogues held in the Great Nature Dialogue. In the dialogues, people collectively sought verbalisa-

tions and formulations for their relationships that support their agency. As part of this, a willingness to take action also arises: *'I now find it even more important to make my own choices to benefit nature.'*

Inspiring and insightful dialogues alone are not enough to stop biodiversity loss. Concrete actions are needed. But the understanding that emerges in dialogue may be the catalyst for action. New understanding can make us observe our environment in different ways and reflect on our own actions. At best, dialogues that bring different people together can lay the ground for new social, ecological and societal innovations that we can use to halt biodiversity loss. The work to save biodiversity is just beginning. We all have a responsibility to promote it.

About the authors

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