

STAKEHOLDER RELATIONS IN THE REGIONAL STATE ADMINISTRATION

Case Central Finland Regional Environment Centre

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>The aim of this study was to shed some light on the communication and relationships between public sector organizations and their stakeholders. This was pursued through a review of relevant literature on public sector organizations, stakeholder thinking and public relations from a relational perspective, as well as an empirical study. The latter consisted of a qualitative case study, focused on the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre, and included two phases, a preliminary research and a main study. The objectives of the empirical part were two: 1) identifying the main stakeholders of the Environment Centre and 2) interviewing them to clarify stakeholders' perceptions about the communication and relationships, as well as to receive suggestions for the communication and the relationship in the new state authority, the Central Finland Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment. To meet these objectives four research questions were formed. The data from the main study, which consisted of eight semi-structured interviews, were analyzed by the means of a qualitative content analysis using both deductive and inductive approaches.</p> <p>The results of the preliminary study show that the main stakeholders of the Environment Centre belong to ten groups including 269 stakeholder organizations and contacts specified by name as well as 46 generic contacts. The findings of the main study indicate that the main communication preferences of the interviewed stakeholders include openness and up-to-date communication. The most preferred communication means and forms are personal contacts. All in all, the interviewed stakeholders are quite satisfied with their relationship with the Environment Centre, which equals a grade 8 in the Finnish school system. However, despite the overall good or average estimation of the relationship, many suggestions for improvement and critical comments were presented too. Issues and aspects of the communication and the relationship that the interviewed stakeholders feel could be improved in the new state authority include e.g. media relations, customer orientation, accessibility to and usability of research, studies and other information produced, as well as cooperation between different actors both within the environmental administration as well as on a wider level, between different sectors. Consequently, it was suggested that future research on stakeholder relations of public sector organizations could focus on cooperation and interrelations between various stakeholder groups by incorporating a network perspective.</p>	
<p>Keywords</p> <p>cooperation, organizational communication, public sector organizations, public relations, regional administration, stakeholders</p>	
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<p>Tiivistelmä</p> <p>Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli selvittää julkisen sektorin organisaatioiden ja niiden sidosryhmien välistä viestintää ja yhteistyösuhteita. Tutkimus koostui kirjallisuuskatsauksesta, jossa käsiteltiin julkisen sektorin organisaatioita, sidosryhmäajattelua sekä yhteisöviestintää suhdejohtamisen näkökulmasta, ja empiirisestä osuudesta. Empiirinen osa toteutettiin laadullisena tapaustutkimuksena, jonka aiheena oli Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskuksen sidosryhmäviestintä. Tutkimus koostui kahdesta vaiheesta ja sillä oli kaksi päätavoitetta: 1) Ympäristökeskuksen tärkeimpien sidosryhmien kartoittaminen ja 2) näiden ryhmien viestintään ja yhteistyösuhteisiin liittyvien näkemysten sekä kehitysehdotusten selvittäminen uutta aluehallintoviranomaista, Keski-Suomen elinkeino-, liikenne- ja ympäristökeskusta, ajatellen. Tutkimuskysymyksiä oli neljä. Päätutkimusaineisto, joka koottiin kahdeksan teemahaastattelun avulla, analysoitiin laadullisen sisällönanalyysin keinoin sekä deduktiivista että induktiivista otetta hyödyntäen.</p> <p>Tutkimustulokset osoittavat, että Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskuksen tärkeimmät sidosryhmät kuuluvat 10 ryhmään sisältäen 269 nimeltä mainittua organisaatiota ja kontaktia sekä 46 yleisempää kontaktia. Haastateltujen sidosryhmien tärkeimpiä viestintäarvostuksia ovat avoimuus ja ajantasainen viestintä. Viestintämuodoista tärkeimmiksi nousevat henkilökohtaiset kontaktit. Kaiken kaikkiaan tutkimuksessa mukana olleet sidosryhmät ovat melko tyytyväisiä suhteeseensa Ympäristökeskuksen kanssa, mikä vastaa kouluarvosana-asteikolla numeroa 8. Tästä huolimatta myös monia kehitysehdotuksia ja kriittisiäkin kommentteja esitettiin. Sidosryhmien mukaan tärkeimpiä kehitettäviä seikkoja viestinnässä ja yhteistyösuhteessa uudessa aluehallintovirastossa ovat mediasuhteet, asiakaslähtöisyys, tutkimusten, selvitysten ja muun Ympäristökeskuksen tuottaman tiedon saatavuus ja käytettävyys sekä yhteistyö eri toimijoiden välillä niin ympäristöhallinnon sisällä kuin muiden sektoreiden toimijoiden kesken. Täten jatkotutkimusaiheeksi julkisten organisaatioiden sidosryhmäsuhteisiin liittyen ehdotettiin eri sidosryhmien välisen yhteistyön ja keskinäisten suhteiden tarkastelemista verkostojen näkökulmasta.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

Current society is often described in terms of changes. One example of these “turbulent times” is the growing significance of different groups and issues permeating local, national and global levels and influencing the lives of organizations (Freeman 1984, 4). As we are entering the second decade of the 21st century, this turbulence has certainly not diminished. On the contrary, various groups that organizations interact with are said to have become even more demanding than before (Näsi 1995, 31; Lehtonen 2002, 7; Luoma-aho 2008, 90). In addition, various developments, issues and other non-human influences in the interorganizational environment further add to the complexity in which organizations today operate (Vos & Schoemaker 2005, 22; Luoma-aho & Paloviita 2010, 50).

This turbulence encompasses also public sector organizations (Lehtonen 2002, 7; Osborne & Brown 2005, 3). The changes and pressures which public sector organizations are currently going through include, for example, increasing expectations from the citizens, growing economic pressures, increasing competition, technological development as well as legislation demanding increasing transparency and communication (Luoma-aho & Peltola 2006, 7; Vuokko 2004, 95). As a consequence of political changes, indicating a move from the state hegemony towards a cooperation between various service-providers to meet public needs, there has been a growth of multiple and complex relationships in the public sector context (Osborne & Brown 2005, 5). Moreover, it has been suggested that the traditionally bureaucratic and slow public sector has to find new ways of coping with the fast and information enriched society, referred to also as the communication society (Luoma-aho & Peltola 2006, 7).

In this previously outlined context of contemporary society, the stakeholder approach has been suggested as a means for navigating amidst the turbulent, exigent environment (e.g. Freeman 1984, 24–25; Luoma-aho 2006, 11). By analyzing and monitoring the corporate environment to identify different

stakes and their holders (Luoma-aho & Paloviita 2010, 49) and by building relationships with its strategic constituencies, an organization “can maintain a positive operating environment” and thus better operate in the turbulent, contemporary society (Luoma-aho 2006, 50).

Similarly, this study deals with stakeholder relations. Stakeholders in this study are understood as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives” (Freeman 1984, 46). Stakeholder relations are studied from an organizational communication and public relations perspective, understood as those planned and long-term communication activities of an organization that are “aimed at creating and maintaining mutual understanding and trust between an organization and its publics” (Lehtonen 1998, 119). It includes “the overall planning, execution, and evaluation of an organization’s communication with both external and internal publics – groups that affect the ability of an organization to meet its goals” (Grunig 1992, 4). The focus of this study is on the relational perspective of organizational communication and public relations, understood as “the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends” (Cutlip, Center & Broom 2006, 3).

The context of this study is the public sector and more precisely the regional state administration that is undergoing consequences of the changing society. A reform project (ALKU) launched in the Government Programme of Matti Vanhanen’s second Cabinet aims at enhancing citizen and customer orientation as well as increasing efficiency and productivity in the regional state administration. As a result, the duties, divisions, roles and steering of regional administrative authorities are redefined. (Ministry of Finance 2009.)

The case organization of the present study, which forms the content and the perspective for studying stakeholder relations of public sector organizations, is the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre. It is one of the 13 regional environment centres operating under the Ministry of the Environment and belongs to the Finnish environmental administration (Environmental Administration 2009). In the context of the reform project, which will result in the abolishment of state provincial offices, employment and economic centres, environmental permit agencies, road districts and occupational health and safety districts of the regional state administration, it will join a new state authority – Central Finland Centre for Business and Industry, Transport and the Environment – in the beginning of 2010 (Ministry of Finance 2009).

Stakeholders have been increasingly studied since 1990’s (Laplume, Sonpar & Litz 2008, 1157). However, in the context of organizational scholarship the focus has been largely on business ethics and management studies

(Koschmann 2007, 17). In the meantime, communication and public relations are areas of scholarship on stakeholders that have been less studied (Koschmann 2007, 1; Wu 2007, 415). In addition, the focus of the existing scholarly literature on stakeholders has been mainly on corporations while the public and non-profit sectors have so far received less attention and been largely uncovered (Luoma-aho 2005, 314; Koschmann 2007, 2–3; Laplume et al. 2008, 1180). Moreover, the majority of the existing studies have been quantitative in nature while a more qualitative approach would be needed to further deepen the understanding of stakeholder-related phenomena (Luoma-aho 2005, 314; Laplume et al. 2008, 1180). The present study seeks to give a contribution, although limited, in filling in these gaps.

The goal of this study, thus, is to better understand the communication and relationships between public sector organizations and their stakeholders. This is pursued through a review of relevant literature as well as an empirical study. The latter is based on a case study approach where a phenomenon, stakeholder relations, is studied through a singular case with the aim of offering some insight into the underlying topic (e.g. Lapan & Armfield 2009). The empirical part of this study has two main objectives and consists of two phases:

1. Mapping the stakeholders of the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre to identify the main groups, and
2. Interviewing them to clarify stakeholders' perceptions about their communication and relationships with the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre, as well as to receive suggestions for the communication and the relationship in the new state authority, the Central Finland Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment.

To meet the above-mentioned objectives the following research questions have been formed:

1. Which groups do the stakeholders of the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre consist of?
2. How do the stakeholders perceive the communication of the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre?
3. How do the stakeholders perceive their relationship with the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre?
4. What suggestions do the stakeholders have for the communication and the relationship in the new state authority?

Communication research is traditionally divided into two main categories: the process school that focuses on the transmission of messages and the semiotic school that studies meanings which are created in the process of

sense making between messages and people who interact (Juholin 2006, 30). The present study falls in the latter category being interested not only in the communication process, or what it consists of, such as the channels, but also in the meanings people assign to the contents of communication processes as well as relationships which are created and maintained through them. A concept that is considered relevant in this respect is perception. Perception in this study is understood as the process of making sense of the variety of inputs that people receive through their senses consisting of active information processing (Greenberg & Baron 1995, 48). This study is interested in stakeholder perceptions – perceptions of the interviewed stakeholders on their communication and relationship with the case organization of this study, Central Finland Regional Environment Centre.

Perceptions studied through interviews being the main focus of this study, the underlying research tradition is thus qualitative in nature assuming an ontological position according to which “people’s knowledge, views, understandings and experiences are meaningful properties of social reality” (Mason 2002, 63). Related to the nature of knowledge, the epistemological position, on the other hand, it is assumed that data can be generated through talking interactively with people, asking them questions and listening to them (Mason 2002, 63–64).

This thesis consists of seven parts. Following the introduction, the theoretical framework that consists of literature on public sector organizations, stakeholder thinking and public relations from a relational perspective (chapters 2, 3 and 4) is presented. Chapter 5 describes the empirical part including methodological choices and the course of the study. Chapter 6 reports findings of the study, and chapter 7 presents discussion and conclusions, evaluation of the study and suggestions for future research.

2 PUBLIC SECTOR

Society can be divided into different sectors. The private sector includes companies that aim at profit making. Different non-governmental organizations and associations form what is called the third sector. The so-called fourth sector includes households, families and networks of friends – informal social groupings of people. (Vuokko 2004, 15.) The present work concentrates on the public sector, which covers, for example, political institutions, governments, various public agencies and public utilities. The public sector can be understood as a set of institutions, which coordinate the interests of different groups that ask for different kinds of public services. (Lane 2000, vii–viii, 1.) The focus of this study is on the Finnish regional state administration that is currently undergoing a reform. As the public sector includes also profit organizations (see table 1), namely public utilities, it is good to specify that public sector in this study is used to refer to public, non-profit organizations.

TABLE 1 Classification of Formal Organizations (Vuokko 2004, 16)

	Profit Organizations	Non-profit Organizations
Private Sector	Companies	Non-governmental organizations, associations (third sector)
Public Sector	Public utilities (state + municipal)	Municipalities, state organizations

This chapter begins by looking into the concept of an organization. Next, public sector organizations and their specific characteristics are described. In addition, different types of public sector organizations as well as public sector environments are depicted. Moreover, some recent trends and developments in the public sector are presented. Finally, the case organization and the respective administrative sector that form the context and the perspective of the present study are described.

2.1 The Concept of Organization

According to Juholin (1999, 23) when studying organizational communication, the first task is to define an organization. In the simplest terms, an organization can be understood as any functional entity with a purpose and goals and a need to tell about itself and communicate with the environment around (Juholin 2006, 17). It can be defined as “a structured social system consisting of groups and individuals working together to meet some agreed-on objectives” (Greenberg & Baron 1995, 10). An organization can, thus, consist of a company, a municipality, a region, a state, an association, a syndicate, an alliance or a movement, to mention but a few (Juholin 2006, 17). The case organization of the present study, the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre, is presented and described in chapter 2.4.1.

The definition of an organization depends also on the theoretical perspective. A classical theory of organizations, dating back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, regards organizations as mechanisms or machines stressing the importance of order, regularity and rationality, key organizational activities being planning, design and maintenance of structure and order. (Kreps 1990, 63.) Hatch and Cunliffe (2006, 14), on the other hand, describe organizations according to more recent approaches – modernism, symbolic-interpretivism and postmodernism. According to a modernistic perspective, organizations are “systems of decision and action driven by norms of rationality, efficiency and effectiveness for stated purposes”. A symbolic-interpretive approach, on the other hand, regards organizations as “socially constructed realities where meanings promote and are promoted by understanding of the self and others that occurs within the organizational context through symbolically mediated interaction”. According to a postmodern approach, further, organizations are “texts produced by and in language, sites for enacting power relations, oppression, irrationality and communicative distortion”. (Hatch & Cunliffe 2006, 14.) Thus, the focus or a metaphor has shifted from machines to systems and from meanings and interpretations to individuality and questioning of the former constructs (Luoma-aho 2005, 31).

In reality, of course, these different approaches exist simultaneously influencing one another. Newer perspectives have not replaced older ones, and especially old organizational structures, such as public sector organizations, are still influenced by the earlier views on organizations. (Hatch & Cunliffe 2006, 6–7; Luoma-aho 2005, 31.) Moreover, it could be argued that as a consequence of globalization and networking, the concept of organization has become more difficult to define. As networks are global, they do not necessarily have boundaries – geographical, national or other. They are not necessarily stable either but constructed around teams, which

can be established for every new project. (Juholin 1999, 24.) In fact, according to one perspective, corresponding with the previously outlined symbolic-interpretive and postmodern approaches, there is no one correct definition of an organization, but rather, every organization can be regarded as a sum of perceptions and interpretations of its members (Aula & Hakala 2000, 9).

Cheney, Christensen, Zorn and Ganesh (2004, 7) relate organizations with communication describing them as patterns or networks of “energies and interactions”, “fabrics of relationships”. This is in line with a systems theoretical approach, explained in more detail in chapter 3.6 with regard to stakeholder relations, the main theoretical focus of the present work. According to a systems theory perspective, an organization is “a complex set of interdependent parts that interact to adapt to a constantly changing environment in order to achieve its goals” (Kreps 1990, 94). As a result, “mutually dependent relationships” are created and maintained between organization and its publics, stakeholders (Cutlip et al. 2006, 176). In other words, organizations do not operate in a vacuum but are always embedded in and related to the environments they operate in.

The environment around organizations consists of all the factors external to an organization. In other words, the environment includes a broad set of phenomena. (Kreps 1990, 224.) However, the line between an organization and its environment is not always easy to draw (Luoma-aho 2005, 28). This corresponds with a systems theoretical perspective according to which organizations have fluid, flexible boundaries, open to inputs and influences of the environment (Cheney et al. 2004, 1). Kreps (1990, 226) speaks of the relevant environment, a concept introduced by Rogers and Agarwala-Rogers (1976), referring to those factors that are most critical or have a direct influence on the organization and its members. According to Kreps, communication contact is a key sign of a relevant environment.

The phenomena, trends or factors in the environment, relevant for an organization, can be related to different sectors or spheres in the general environment: social, cultural, political, legal, economical, physical and technological. The social environment includes, for example, demographics, life styles, social movements and social institutions, such as educational systems. The cultural environment is based on history, traditions, norms, beliefs and values. The legal sector, on the other hand, is formed around the constitution and laws as well as legal practices according to which certain professions are conducted. The political environment is based on the distribution and concentration of power and political systems. The economic sector, on the other hand, comprises labour markets, financial markets and markets for goods and services. The technological environment is related to scientific developments and their applications which organizations can make

use of. Finally, the physical sector includes natural resources and effects of the nature. (Hatch & Cunliffe 2006, 68–71).

The different spheres of the environment are intertwined in many ways so that trends in one sector are related to and influence trends in all other spheres. For example, as Hatch and Cunliffe (2006, 70) point out, political and economic sectors are so closely connected that analyzing them separately makes little sense. This is very much true also in the public sector context where the introduction of economic trends has changed the traditional image of public sector organizations over the past two decades (see e.g. Osborne & Brown 2005). Moreover, the picture is further complicated when an international or global dimension is added. Consequently, the environments of organizations today often extend beyond the boundaries of their home countries further linking them to many other interrelated environments. Similarly, trends and influences can appear also in different spheres of the international environment mixing together with trends in the general environment. In sum, organizations operate in highly complex environments different aspects of which are interrelated and intertwined. (Hatch & Cunliffe 2006, 72–77.)

The organizational environment has been described also in terms of four different components (see figure 1). The macro environment is composed of larger societal forces, described earlier. The public environment consists of groups and organizations that have an interest in the organization. The competitive environment covers other organizations competing for same resources. Finally, the market environment consists of groups and organizations that share the same mission and collaborate. (Luoma-aho 2005, 28 citing Kotler & Andreasen 1987.) To better suit the public sector context, the market environment could also be called the collaborative environment.

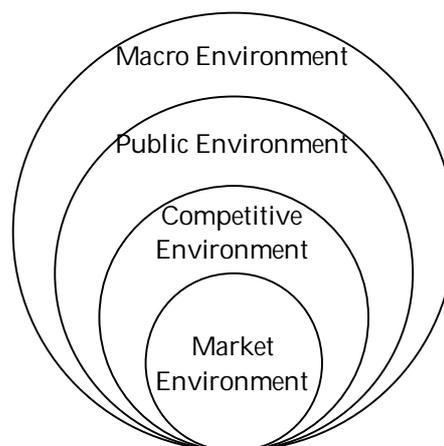


FIGURE 1 Four Components of the Organizational Environment Based on Luoma-aho (2005, 28 citing Kotler & Andreasen 1987)

According to Hatch and Cunliffe (2006), stakeholder theory, the topic of chapter 3, represents a postmodern perspective of organization–environment relations. As a result of boundarylessness, the organization is extended to its stakeholders whose interests become one with those of the organization. As a result, an ethical obligation binds the organization with the wider social and physical environment around it. (Hatch & Cunliffe 2006, 94–95.)

2.2 Public Sector Organizations

The public sector has unique characteristics, which differentiate it from the other sectors, especially its private counterpart (e.g. Nieminen 2000). Although as a consequence of some recent developments, in particular the adoption of private sector and business approaches in the public sector context, explained in chapter 2.3, differences between public and private sector organizations have become smaller.

Public sector organizations are said to exist to serve the so-called public interest, in contrast to the self-interests of the private sector. It includes the notion that public officials are “contracted” to serve the interests of citizens (Lane 2000, 7). Underlying is a dichotomy of interest, understood as personal wishes, and public referring to something collective and shared. The concept of public interest can be contested in many ways. What the notion, nevertheless, well describes is the idea that the state and the representative public institutions coordinate various interests into decisions and outcomes that are collective, based on the principle of democracy. (Lane 2000, 1, 6–7, 12.)

Serving the public interest refers to the motive for which public sector organizations exist differentiating them from companies and public utilities. The prior aim of non-profit organizations, according to Vuokko (2004, 20), is the realization of their mission. Thus, also values are fundamentally different in the two sectors. Central values in a democratic society include equality, justice and social responsibility, which in Finland are guaranteed by the Constitution. Consequently, also the tasks public sector organizations are in charge of are different: they are related to the basic functions and services of society, such as health care or education, which in a democratic society have not been considered appropriate for the private entrepreneurship. (Nieminen 2000, 110–111.)

The provision of basic functions and services being at the core of public sector tasks refers to the intangible nature of the “products” public sector organizations offer which, besides services, include for example mindsets and behaviours (Vuokko 2004, 26). Gelders, Bouckaert and Van Ruler (2007,

332) speak of more diverse products referring to “the political product” being more complicated as well as intangible.

According to Gelders et al. (2007, 329), public sector organizations are also surrounded by a more complicated, unstable environment. In other words, the legitimacy of the organization and its objectives is often not in the hands of the organization itself but, instead, determined in the political policymaking process, which is lead by a complex network of actors. Also Liu and Horsley (2007, 378) stress the role of politics as public sector organizations, indeed, are “defined by political actions and relationships”. This applies also to the context of the present study, the regional state administration in the Central Finland region, which is in the midst of fundamental changes as a consequence of a reform project launched by the Government Program of Matti Vanhanen’s second Cabinet.

Fragile in the light of political processes is in contrast to how the public sector is traditionally perceived – as big, bureaucratic, and constrained by various laws and regulations (Vuokko 2004, 101). Although seemingly contradictory, these two things can also be regarded as “two sides of one coin”, as Luoma-aho (2005, 42) puts it. She describes a pull between isomorphism and contingency – a tendency towards stability vs. change – that an organization tries to balance with.

Traditionally, public sector organizations have often occupied a monopoly within their own domain in comparison to companies that have had to compete with others in their field (Nieminen 2000, 110). The funding of public sector organizations is also different. State and municipalities collect compulsory taxes from citizens and companies in order to maintain and finance public services. Later on, those services are targeted, directly or indirectly, mainly to the same audience that the taxes were collected from in the first place. (Vuokko 2004, 23–24.) In addition, the membership of public sector organizations is in principal granted for everyone by the Constitution (Nieminen 2000, 112.) Thus, public sector organizations have more stakeholders than private organizations. In addition, all stakeholders should be equally considered, which poses a challenge for public sector organizations in comparison to their private counterparts that can choose which stakeholders to concentrate on. (Grunig & Jaatinen 1999 in Luoma-aho 2005, 72.)

Despite the intangible, non-profit nature of public sector activities, public sector organizations are not without economic objectives, as Vuokko reminds. Moreover, also non-profit organizations aim at producing results. The profit, nevertheless, is not counted in only financial terms but as, for example, social profit. In addition, a possible surplus in the non-profit sector

is not distributed to owners but saved and used for the fulfilment of its mission. (Vuokko 2004, 20.)

The criteria for evaluating operations and achievements also differ in the non-profit sector where the economic gain is not the main priority. Consequently, one perspective for evaluating the activities of public sector organizations is that of stakeholders – how they perceive the organization. (Vuokko 2004, 27.)

2.2.1 Types of Public Sector Organizations

Van der Hart (1990, 35) divides public sector organizations into four different types according to 1) the degree of direct vs. indirect contact between the organization and the public and 2) the degree to which the services cost. Vuokko (2004) and Luoma-aho (2005) have applied this typology in the context of Finnish public sector organizations. The first type of organizations has a lot of contact with the public while the service is generally free of charge including, for example, educational institutions or regulatory organizations, such as the police. The second type consists of public sector organizations that have high degree of contact with the public and where the services are paid for, such as post offices or railways. These are semi-commercial or privatized organizations offering public services. The third type includes agencies and organizations that are more distant and which have little direct contact with the public and low or no fees for their services, such as research, legislative or regulation-centred public sector organizations and departments within ministries. The fourth type consists of those public sector organizations with little contact with the public and paid services including, for example, pension funds and public utilities. (Van der Hart 1990, 35–38; Luoma-aho 2005, 56–57.)

Moreover, Van der Hart explains to what extent customer orientation can be applied to each organization type and how well the question “who is the customer” can be answered. While in the first two types the customers can be easily identified, in the two latter types it is not necessarily so. Especially for the type three organizations, customer thinking poses difficulties. (Van der Hart 1990, 37.) For the case organization of the present study, Central Finland Regional Environment Centre, being a research, authority and regulation-centred organization and belonging to the third type of organizations, this is good to bear in mind. From a theoretical perspective, thus, it could be hypothesized that a customer or stakeholder approach could be difficult to establish in the context of regional environment centres.

According to Van der Hart, furthermore, the type three organizations face contradictions while trying to serve two distinct groups of customers: citizens as the subjects of legislation, on one hand, and politics, the legislative

customer, on the other hand. The closer the organization works in relation to the Parliament, the more distant is the relation towards citizens likely to become. (Van der Hart 1990, 37.) On the contrary, for business-type governmental organizations or semi-commercial public sector organizations, representing the second type, relationships with stakeholders are more evident, straightforward and thus easier to establish (Luoma-aho 2005, 58). For the first type of organizations, although contacts with publics are frequent, the free nature of services creates a situation where the organization does not depend directly on the customers and, instead of considering customer needs, rather expects them to content with what is being offered (Van der Hart 1990, 35–36).

Kotler (1975 in Luoma-aho 2005), on the other hand, has divided public sector organizations into four groups according to their main function: 1) business-type governmental agencies, 2) service-type governmental agencies, 3) transfer-type governmental agencies and 4) intervention-type governmental agencies. Despite this division, similarities in tasks between the different groups may exist to some degree. While service-type organizations exist to produce services, transfer-type governmental agencies are there to distribute funds among the citizens and intervention-type agencies to regulate certain groups and their functions. (Kotler 1975, 331–334 in Luoma-aho 2005, 55–56.) With regard to this typology, the case organization Central Finland Regional Environment Centre would mainly correspond with the intervention-type governmental agencies. As Kotler points out, the customers of this type of organizations may be problematic, as they do not always want to be regulated. Moreover, the whole population may be considered customers even though they are not always themselves aware of being regulated. (Kotler 1975, 331–334 in Luoma-aho 2005, 56.)

2.2.2 Public Sector Environments

Liu and Horsley (2007) describe the public sector environment by illustrating four coexisting, complementary environments, “microenvironments” in which public sector organizations operate: multilevel, intragovernmental, intergovernmental and external. The multilevel microenvironment involves two or more levels of government collaborating. (Liu & Horsley 2007, 384.) In the context of Finland, this could imply state organizations and municipal agencies working together. In the intergovernmental microenvironment, on the other hand, two or more units at the same governmental level cooperate (Liu & Horsley 2007, 384). In the context of the present study, this could mean different regional authorities collaborating. The intragovernmental microenvironment, further, refers to a single agency – part of local, regional or national level – acting. Finally, in the external microenvironment any unit or level of government cooperates with companies or non-governmental organizations. (Liu & Horsley 2007, 386.)

2.3 Trends and Developments in the Public Sector

Public sector organizations have gone through substantial changes in the past two decades (Osborne & Brown 2005, 3). Behind these changes, there is a whole range of factors, developments and trends varying from the market-led to the politically directed and the technologically facilitated (Martínez Lucio 2007, 6–7). Moreover, these changes have been a result of a growingly uncertain societal and political environment as well as a decrease of public resources (Osborne & Brown 2005, 3). The rapid and unpredictable changes that take place in the environments organizations currently operate in have been referred to also as turbulence – a continuous change that influences organizational contexts (Cheney et al. 2004, 340). Change, or social change, on the other hand, can be defined as “the process by which alteration occurs in the structure and function of a social system” (Rogers 2003, 6). In the context of public sector organizations, change can be understood as “a gradual improvement and/or development of the existing services provided by a public service organization and/or their organizational context” (Osborne & Brown 2005, 4).

Osborne and Brown (2005) describe recent changes in the public sector environment. According to them, the main changes include, first, global economic changes, which have resulted in a need to focus on an effective and efficient use of increasingly scarce resources. Consequently, a growth of a managerial, in contrast to the traditionally administrative, approach to providing public services has appeared, commonly referred to as the New Public Management. Third, there have been demographic changes, such as the ageing of population, in many countries. Fourth, there have been changes in the expectations of citizens becoming more demanding and “sophisticated” requiring more choice and quality from public services. Fifth, there have been political changes that have indicated a move from the state hegemony towards a cooperation of various service providers, resulting in multiple and complex relationships, to meet public needs. (Osborne & Brown 2005, 4–5.) The last two tendencies are especially relevant from the perspective of the present work: growing expectations from the side of citizens and the governance of multiple relationships in the provision of public services stress the importance of stakeholder relations.

Martínez Lucio (2007 citing Kirkpatrick 2006), on the other hand, mentions three main aspects of organizational change in the public sector: a move away from the vertical integration towards fragmentation and decentralization of the management of public services as well as an increased flexibility of service delivery and employment. These are so-called general trends that mark the public sector changes. However, the form and degree of development and realization vary from one country to another. (Martínez Lucio 2007, 7.)

Denhardt and Denhardt (2000) describe the past changes in the public management by comparing three perspectives – the old public administration, the new public management and the new public service. The old public administration, according to them, is based on a political neutrality giving emphasis on the idea of a neutral competence. Moreover, the focus of government is on the direct service delivery, the best organizational structure being a central bureaucracy. Implementation of programs is carried out through top-down control mechanisms while deliberation is limited. Public agencies are bureaucracies defined as “closed systems” limiting outside influence, such as the citizen involvement. The principal values of the old style public sector organizations are efficiency and rationality. Public administrators are in charge of the efficient implementation of public objectives while their role in the policymaking and governance is only marginal. (Denhardt & Denhardt 2000, 551–552.) Although new trends are described as an alternative to the old or traditional administration model, traditional patterns of organization and administration do exist and are still present in today’s public sector organizations in Finland (Luoma-aho 2005, 55).

The New Public Management (NPM), on the contrary, is a movement based on a managerial ideology that has transformed and challenged the state and the underlying bureaucratic principles on which the Western administrative systems have traditionally been built on (Horton 2006, 536). It covers a set of ideas and practices that are based on using private sector and business approaches in the public sector and supported by neoliberalist thinking. A common feature has been the application of market mechanisms and terminology. For example, the relationships between public agencies and their constituencies are considered to be based on self-interests involving similar transactions as in the market place. Moreover, the central term applied for public sector constituencies is that of a customer. In fact, customer orientation is another phenomenon related to NPM. With the state as an entrepreneur and citizens as customers, public officials and policy makers become managers whose task is to manage public funds in a profitable and efficient way. Moreover, productivity and high performances are emphasized and measured to determine outputs. (Denhardt & Denhardt 2000, 550; Luoma-aho 2005, 75, 82; Martínez Lucio 2007, 7–8.)

As a consequence of the new managerial ethos, public sector organizations have had to develop managerial skills and new organizational forms, and to shift towards a culture based on a market logic instead of hierarchical line management (Osborne & Brown 2005, 14). Moreover, as a result of a policy of privatization many public agencies have turned into private enterprises (Martínez Lucio 2007, 7). In the meantime, previously bureaucratic public sector organizations have been “restructured”, organizational missions “redefined”, processes “streamlined” and decision making “decentralized”

(Denhardt & Denhardt 2000, 550). These trends can be found reflected also in the Reform Project for Regional State Administration that influences the context of this study and which is explained in the following chapter. Finally, to sum up, the New Public Management includes not only new management techniques but involves also a set of values drawn from the private sector and the business world (Denhardt & Denhardt 2000, 551).

According to Lumijärvi and Jylhäsaari (2000), the result-based management system, adopted in Finland in the 1990's, reflects the tendencies of the New Public Management. Steering according to norms and resources was replaced by steering according to results. Interdependence between objectives and resources as well as the independence and responsibility of lower administrative units are emphasized. Moreover, the political mechanism is regarded as the ultimate body, which sets the framework for goals and resources. (Lumijärvi & Jylhäsaari 2000, 12.) In other words, the model is based on political objectives defined in governmental programs. The different ministries promote the realization of these objectives through steering by results and through making result-based agreements with the various offices and departments within their own administrative sectors. (Valtiovarainministeriö 2010.)

Another management model related to the New Public Management has been the Total Quality Management (TQM) (Denhardt & Denhardt 2000, 551). It has been discussed also in the Finnish public sector context. The focus of this model is on ensuring comprehensive quality for all organizational processes and meeting the needs and expectations of customers, involving both the management and personnel in collaboration, the use of quantitative measurements as well as a process orientation. (Lumijärvi & Jylhäsaari 2000, 29.) Placing the customer in a central position and acknowledging the importance of ensuring quality also in the networks between collaborates, TQM is linked also to stakeholder thinking.

In fact, customer orientation is a phenomenon much discussed in the public sector context today. According to Vuokko, the pressures public sector organizations face in terms of developing a more customer-oriented approach can be divided into four main categories. One, organization-related pressures include demands for efficiency, increasing self-government and dismantlement of administrative orders and bureaucracy. Second, pressures related to clientele include an increase of quality awareness among citizens, a demand from citizens to get their tax money's worth and to get good services. Moreover, a satisfied customer is expected to defend and support public services. Third, there are pressures related to competition including demolition of barriers to competition, privatization of public services and an increasing significance of competition. Finally, pressures from the side of other stakeholders consist of changes in partnerships as well as an increased

publicity. In fact, when understood as a receiver-centred approach or a target group orientation, covering the recognition and consideration of the needs of stakeholders, central to the organization in terms of its goals and objectives, the customer-centred approach is closely related to stakeholder thinking too. Moreover, customer is a term often used in the field of marketing while target groups and stakeholders are more common in the field of communication. (Vuokko 2004, 66, 95–96.)

At the centre of a third perspective for public administration, the New Public Service, proposed by Denhardt and Denhardt, is the citizen. It comprises a set of key ideas, distinct from the old public administration model and the New Public Management. For example, “Serve, rather than steer” includes a perspective that instead of controlling society, public officials should help citizens to articulate and meet shared interests. The state is no longer in charge alone but, instead, one of the many players in the field of complex interactions involving multiple groups and multiple interests. The role of government, thus, moves from controlling towards agenda setting, facilitating discussion, negotiating and brokering solutions to public problems. (Denhardt & Denhardt 2000, 552–553.)

2.4 Context of the Study – Regional State Administration

The public sector in Finland is large, in terms of both employed labour force as well as its share of the GDP (Ministry of Finance 2006, 1). Consequently, it can be considered an important sector (Vuokko 2004, 15). The number of public sector personnel in 2004 was approximately 576 400, corresponding to 24,5 % of the total of 2,4 million employees in all the sectors. Moreover, the public services in Finland are extensive. They are funded by tax revenue, which makes the tax percentage high. (Ministry of Finance 2006, 1.) Tasks the Finnish public sector organizations are in charge of are diverse including traditional public functions, such as taking care of internal and external safety, and judicial administration. Infrastructural functions include managing housing, community structures and traffic. Economic functions include promotion of industrial and commercial activity. Welfare functions, on the other hand, include ensuring and organizing education and cultural services, health care and other social services. (Vuokko 2004, 90.) Another basic function that could be mentioned is ensuring environmental sustainability reflecting the focus of the present study on the environmental administration.

Moreover, the Finnish public sector organizations operate on several levels – national, regional and municipal – public administration being divided accordingly into central, regional and local administration (Luoma-aho 2005, 51; Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2001, 14). The focus of the present study is on the

regional state administration, which the case organization Central Finland Regional Environment Centre, presented next, is representative of. Together with the Reform Project for Regional State Administration (ALKU) it composes the context of the present study.

2.4.1 Case Organization Central Finland Regional Environment Centre and Finland's Environmental Administration

Central Finland Regional Environment Centre (Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskus), which represents the case organization of the current study, is one of the 13 regional environment centres and belongs to the Finnish environmental administration (Environmental Administration 2009). The regional environment centres were established in 1995 as a result of a reform in the environmental administration that brought the former regional authorities, water and environmental districts and the environmental departments of the state provincial offices (vesi- ja ympäristöpiirit sekä lääninhallituksen ympäristöyksiköt) in one unit (Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskus 2005; Ympäristöhallinto 1995 in Kiiskinen 2001, 213).

Besides the 13 regional environment centres, the Finnish environmental administration consists of three permit authorities, the Finnish Environmental Institute (SYKE) and the Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland (ARA) and is lead by the Ministry of the Environment. In addition, the Natural Heritage Services section of the Metsähallitus, formerly known as Forest and Park Service, is also supervised by the Ministry of the Environment. (Environmental Administration 2009.) The vision of Finland's environmental administration includes an eco-efficient society, biodiversity, and environment that promotes well-being (Ministry of the Environment 2009).

According to the Act on the Environmental Administration, the general tasks of the environmental administration include promotion of sustainable development and sustainable use of natural resources, environmental protection, conservation of biodiversity as well as the aesthetic and cultural values of the environment, development of human environment and community structure, as well as taking care of the use and management of water resources (Laki ympäristöhallinnosta 55/1995, 1§).

The regional environment centres are in charge of executing environmental administration in the regional level (Laki ympäristöhallinnosta 55/1995, 3§). They work under the auspices of the Ministry of the Environment except for the matters related to the management and use of water resources where they are supervised by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (Environmental Administration 2009). Some tasks the environment centres are in charge of include environmental protection, construction and land use

planning, nature conservation, management of cultural landscapes, promotion and monitoring of waste management, issuing and supervising environmental permits, research on pollution and the state of the environment as well as promotion of environmental awareness (Environmental Administration 2009; Ministry of the Environment 2009). The environment centres work in close cooperation with the local administration, other regional administrative authorities, the regional councils, local residents and other organizations (Ministry of the Environment 2009).

Central Finland Regional Environment Centre is located in Jyväskylä and its territory comprises the 23 municipalities of the Central Finland region. It is organized around six units or departments: Environmental Protection Unit, Nature Conservation and Cultural Heritage Unit, Communities Unit, Environmental Construction Unit, Research and Development Unit and Administration Unit. (Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskus 2009a.) In this work the terms Central Finland Regional Environment Centre and the Environment Centre are used as synonyms.

2.4.2 Reform Project for Regional State Administration

The context where the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre operates is shaped by the current Reform Project for Regional State Administration (ALKU-hanke). It is a project that is based on the Government Programme of Matti Vanhanen's second Cabinet and was launched in June 2007, due in the end of December 2009. The project aims at reorganizing the regional state administration in a way that citizen and customer orientation is promoted and efficiency and productivity increased. As a result, the duties, divisions, steering and numbers of regional administrative authorities are redefined. (Ministry of Finance 2009.)

Consequently, regional environment centres, together with state provincial offices, employment and economic centres, environmental permit agencies, road districts and occupational health and safety districts, will be abolished. The functions and tasks of these authorities will be reorganized into two new regional state administrative bodies: the Regional State Administrative Agencies (AVI) and the Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY). The Regional State Administrative Agencies will be six and the Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment 15 in number and they will start functioning 1 January, 2010. (Ministry of Finance 2009.)

In the case of the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre, this implies merging together with the Employment and Economic Development Centre for Central Finland (Keski-Suomen TE-keskus), the Central Finland Road Region (Keski-Suomen tiepiiri) and parts of the State Provincial Office of

Western Finland (Länsi-Suomen lääninhallitus) that will together form the Central Finland Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (Keski-Suomen elinkeino-, liikenne- ja ympäristökeskus) which will be located in Jyväskylä. The environmental permits, on the contrary, will be handled in the Regional State Administrative Agency for Western and Inland Finland with a main office in Vaasa and subsidiaries in Tampere and Jyväskylä. (Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskus 2009b.)

The reform is taken into consideration also in the present study, as one objective of the empirical part is to find out what suggestions the stakeholders of the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre have for the communication and the relationship in the new state authority. The new state authority, Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment, is referred to also as the ELY Centre, Employment and Economic Development Centre for Central Finland as the Employment and Economic Development Centre or TE Centre, and Central Finland Road Region as the Road Region.

3 STAKEHOLDER RELATIONS

The concept of stakeholder has come into prominence in the last two decades (Luoma-aho 2005, 96; Laplume et al. 2008, 1156). The concept first took root in the field of strategic management, then organization theory and business ethics (Laplume et al. 2008, 1156). The basic idea behind it is that different groups who have stakes “interact with the organization thus making its operation possible” (Näsi 1995, 19). From an organizational communication and public relations perspective focused on “the management of communication between organization and its publics” (Grunig & Hunt 1984, 6 in Grunig 1992, 4), studying stakeholders – all those instances the existence of an organization depends on, and relations they have with the organization – is relevant (Grunig 1992). Recently it has been suggested that public relations equals stakeholder relations (Wu 2007, 415).

This chapter begins with describing stakeholder thinking. Next, it presents different typologies and descriptions that emerge from the literature to classify stakeholders. Moreover, the process of prioritizing stakeholders for public relations as well as some criticism that the stakeholder model has received are presented. Finally, a brief explanation is given on networks and systems theory.

3.1 Stakeholder Thinking

Stakeholder theory as such is hard to formulate for which it has also been criticized and debated (Luoma-aho 2005, 98). More than a theory, it is a framework, which consists of a collection of perspectives from different scholars and disciplines (Lehtonen 2002, 15). Definitions on stakeholders, thus, vary according to disciplines in which the theory is used (Wu 2007, 416). Consequently, stakeholder theory is also referred to as stakeholder thinking (Luoma-aho 2005, 98).

Stakeholder thinking has its roots in management theory and developed in North America from 1930's onwards (Näsi 1995, 19). According to Freeman (1984, 31), the first explicit definition of the concept was given in 1963 by Stanford Research Institute. In Scandinavia also, the concept went through a period of blossoming in 1960's and 70's. It was not, however, until Freeman's (1984) seminal work "Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach" that the framework for the concept was fully articulated and the theory started to gain momentum. (Näsi 1995, 19–20).

Freeman based the stakeholder approach on strategic management and drew on literature from corporate planning, systems theory and corporate social responsibility (Laplume et al. 2008, 1157). His main argument was that the existing management theories did not take into account the turbulent changes in the organizational environments (Freeman 1984, 4-5; Laplume et al. 2008). Thus, he suggested redrawing the picture of the firm (see figure 2) to include "all those groups and individuals that can affect, or are affected by, the accomplishment of organizational purpose" (Freeman 1984, 24–25). The fundamental behind the concept was that an organization should be managed in a way that considers all constituencies – not only shareholders (Lehtonen 2002, 15; Laplume et al. 2008, 1153). Thus, it rose to complete the traditional managerial input–output model where a company was related to only four groups: suppliers, employees, shareholders and clients (Fassin 2009, 114).

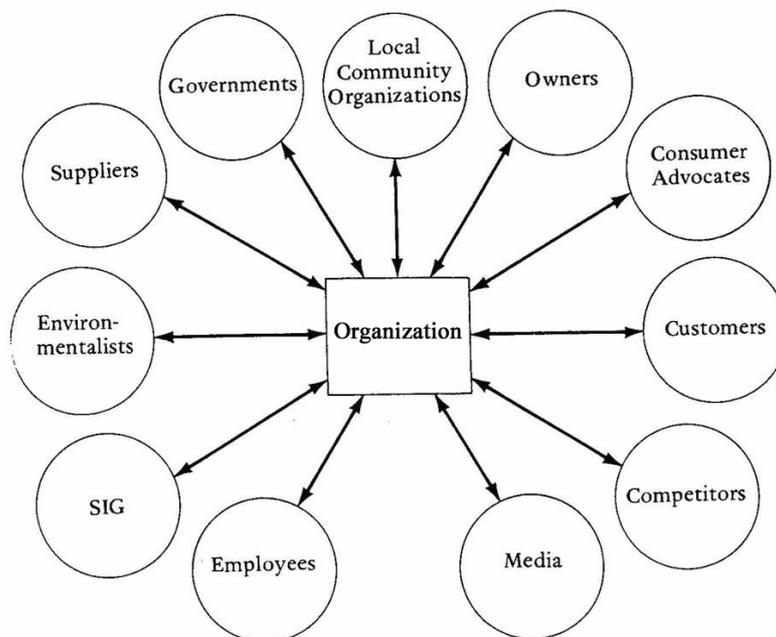


FIGURE 2 Stakeholder View of Organization (Freeman 1984, 25)

Laplume et al. (2008) reviewed stakeholder theory literature in the main management journals since Freeman's setting of the framework in 1984 and

found five central themes: stakeholder definition and salience, stakeholder actions and responses, firm actions and responses, firm performance and theory debates.

Stakeholders are defined according to Freeman (1984, 46) as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives”. Lehtonen (1998, 121) adds to Freeman’s definition those instances “whom operation of an organization concerns”. The idea is that also those parties who may not directly be involved with the organization may be stakeholders. These perspectives correspond with the so-called broad view on stakeholders (Mitchell, Agle & Wood 1997, 856). Accordingly, almost anyone or any group can be considered a stakeholder for a given organization (Wu 2007, 416).

According to Donaldson and Preston (1995), stakeholder theory has three dimensions: descriptive, instrumental and normative. The descriptive, or empirical, aspect of the theory explains relationships that can be observed in the external world. The instrumental aspect describes what outcomes result when theory is applied. Finally, the normative aspect of the theory suggests how organizations should behave towards their stakeholders. According to Donaldson and Preston, the three aspects are interrelated, yet, a distinct normative basis is fundamental. (Donaldson & Preston 1995, 65, 75.)

Stakeholders are often described with the help of a graphical illustration (compare figure 2). The organization is depicted in the centre and the main groups of stakeholders in a circle around it. These groups may include, for example, personnel, financiers, suppliers, clients, competitors, governments, general public, special interest groups (SIG), media as well as unions and pressure groups (Vos & Schoemaker 2006, 93; Freeman 1984, 25). Freeman called this picture also a generic stakeholder map. In practice, the picture can be modified according to the environment in which the organization operates. (Freeman 1984, 54.) In this study, the stakeholders of the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre are grouped into eleven categories based on the communication and data management strategies of the environmental administration, as explained in chapter 5.2.

Stake, on the other hand, can be understood as a claim from the side of stakeholders “for something due or believed to be due” (Näsi 1995, 23). There are many kinds of stakes. Most common is money; other kinds of stakes include, for example, labour, know-how or participation. Many times a stake is something that expects a return, for example, power or chances for participation. (Juholin 2006, 35.) In the case of public sector organizations, stakes are often more intangible in nature (Vuokko 2004, 20). With regard to communication in the regional state administration, a stake could be a chance for stakeholders to voice their opinions. It could also be a legal issue,

such as an environmental permit for an industrial plant, or a financial issue, such as a subsidy for a project related to environmental education. A stake is generally something positive and constructive. In other cases, however, a stakeholder group might be formed around an issue for which it opposes an organization as in the case of product boycotts. (Juholin 2006, 35.)

Wu (2007) divides stakes into three types: 1) product and revenue, 2) policy and regulation, and 3) perception and reputation. The first types of stakes are so-called bottom line stakes as they are connected with the basic functions of an organization. It is the support and commitment of stakeholders with this type of stakes that a smooth operation and ultimately the survival of an organization is dependent on. Those stakeholders who have the power to draw the lines and make the rules that set the limits for the operations of an organization, on the other hand, possess procedural stakes, related to type two, policy and regulation. Finally, type three, perception and reputation, consists of so-called high-end stakes, which can set pressure on the lower levels of stakes, or be translated into product and revenue stakes. To some extent all stakeholders have perception and reputation stakes. However, some groups are more prone to influences on this kind of stakes, especially, when it comes to issues that are sensitive, "non-business-oriented" in nature. (Wu 2007, 421–423.)

3.2 Classifying Stakeholders

Stakeholders have been described and classified in various ways. According to Lehtonen (2002), stakeholders are like invisible partners who need to be considered as much as those who are directly involved. He further describes four different types of stakeholders an organization may have: 1) those who may affect the operation of an organization, 2) those who are affected, 3) those with whom an organization most deals with and 4) those who are central given the mission and values of an organization (Lehtonen 2002, 14–15). A more recent description by Luoma-aho (2008, 80, 90) of "hate-holders" and "faith-holders" indicates a new trend or era when stakeholders express not only their needs and wishes but also strong emotions.

As Luoma-aho mentions (2008, 90), it is vital for an organization to have more faith-holders than hate-holders. In the long run, an organization must thus operate in a way that stakeholders remain satisfied, or else the existence of that organization is in danger (Näsi 1995, 24). In fact, Lehtonen suggests that when the interests of an organization are in contradiction with those of their stakeholders, a risk is born. Further, he adds that organizational crises are often caused by events related to stakeholders, such as misinterpreting their value or significance. (Lehtonen 2002, 15, 36.) Consequently, it has been

said that in today's society no organization can have a strategy independent of its environment (Lehtonen 1998, 121).

Carroll (1993, 62) speaks of primary and secondary stakeholders; the former have an official or contractual relationship with the organization while all others are classified as secondary stakeholders. Mitchell et al. (1997), on the other hand, describe stakeholders according to three attributes, or types of stakes: power, legitimacy and urgency and propose a theory for identifying "who and what really counts" (see figure 3). Dormant stakeholders (1) are those who have power but no legitimate relationship or urgent claim to impose their power. Discretionary stakeholders (2) possess legitimacy but have neither power nor urgency of their claims. Demanding stakeholders (3) have an urgent claim but none of the other two attributes, power or legitimacy. Together these three types of stakeholders form a group of latent stakeholders. Expectant stakeholders, further, possess two of the three attributes and include dominant stakeholders, dangerous stakeholders and dependent stakeholders. Dominant stakeholders (4) are those who have power and legitimacy. Dangerous stakeholders (5) possess urgency and power without legitimacy. Dependent stakeholders (6) lack power but do have legitimacy and urgency. Finally, when all the three attributes exist at the same time, a stakeholder can be called a definitive stakeholder (7). (Mitchell et al. 1997, 874–878.)

Luoma-aho (2005) has further added a dimension of frequency in the model of Mitchell et al. (1997). According to Luoma-aho (2005, 104, 106), frequency of contact is defined as "contacts, mediated or not, between the organization and the stakeholders, such as formal and informal meetings, phone-calls, e-mails or other interpersonal contact[s]" and can vary between none to rare, occasional, frequent and constant. As a result, she adds four types of stakeholders in the picture: familiar stakeholders, strong stakeholders, decent stakeholders and active stakeholders (see figure 3). Familiar stakeholders (a) are those with a frequent contact but none of the attributes explained by Mitchell et al. (1997), power, legitimacy or urgency. Strong stakeholders (b) possess power and a frequent contact. Decent stakeholders (c) have legitimacy and a frequent contact while active stakeholders (d) possess urgency and a frequent contact. Stakeholders with power, urgency and frequent contacts are called dangerous stakeholders (5), and stakeholders with all the four attributes, frequent contact, power, urgency and legitimacy, definitive stakeholders (7), as in the model of Mitchell et al. (1997). (Luoma-aho 2005, 105–106.) In this study, which is focused besides stakeholder identification on stakeholder perceptions, those stakeholders whose contacts with the organization are more frequent and definitive constitute a group of informants, central for assessing communication of the case organization.

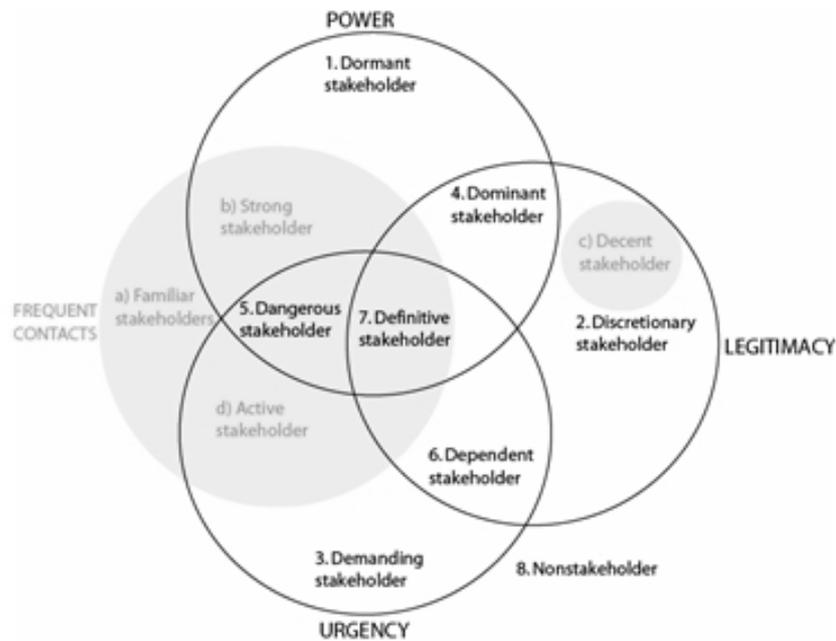


FIGURE 3 Stakeholder Typology by Mitchell et al. (1997, 874) Modified by Luoma-aho (2005, 105)

In a more recent description of the stakeholder model, Fassin (2009) introduces two new terms: stakewatchers and stakekeepers. He describes stakeholders as those constituencies or partners who hold the stake, stakewatchers as mainly pressure groups who watch the stake and stakekeepers as regulators who keep the stake. The model intends to explain the organization–environment relationship, what it consists of and how different parts are interrelated, with a help of a graphical presentation in the form of a solar system metaphor. (Fassin 2009, 128.)

The term faith-holder is also used to describe stakeholders of public sector organizations. Faith-holders consist of those frequent stakeholders who possess high levels of trust, equal to faith, towards the organization. In addition, they may possess power, legitimacy, urgency and frequency, which further make them definitive stakeholders (Mitchell et al. 1997) – yet strong form of trust is the foundation of their relationship with the organization. Furthermore, trust is combined with a neutral, maintainable reputation. Any stakeholder can become a faith-holder through frequent contacts and high trust. (Luoma-aho 2005, 303–304.)

An organization is connected to its stakeholders through various relations. Grunig and Hunt (1984 in Dozier & Ehling 1992, 170) use the term linkage, based on Esman's (1972) categorization, to describe the relations of an organization with its stakeholders and explain how an organization is linked to its environment. Enabling linkages, also called preconditional relationships by Vos and Schoemaker (2005, 46), are those without which the

organization could not exist, such as regulatory bodies or the government, providing them legitimacy. Functional linkages provide input, such as labour, for the organization and users who consume the output. Normative linkages refer to connections with similar organizations, such as professional associations, to cooperate and solve shared problems. Diffused linkages are those that have an interest but no formal relationship with the organization, such as community residents or activists. (Dozier & Ehling 1992, 170; Gregory 2001, 39–40.) According to Vos and Schoemaker (2005, 46), diffuse linkages “reflect the unorganized public opinion”.

Jancic (1999 in Podnar & Jancic 2006, 300), on the contrary, speaks of three levels of exchange and communication when describing the relations of an organization with its stakeholders: inevitable relation, necessary relation and desirable relation. An organization must adjust its communication activities according to the level of exchange it has with the stakeholders in order to maintain a good relationship (Podnar & Jancic 2006, 300). Combining the level of exchange with the linkage model, enabling linkages could correspond to inevitable relations, functional and normative linkages to necessary relations, and diffused linkages to desirable relations. The concept “desirable relation” well reflects the fact that it is desirable to maintain good relations even with the so-called more marginal stakeholders although it may not always be possible.

3.3 Prioritizing Stakeholders for Public Relations

One of the dilemmas related to stakeholder relations and communication surrounds the question of which stakeholders the organization should pay attention to (Luoma-aho 2005, 108). This issue becomes especially relevant when stakeholders are defined in a wide sense as all those instances that can affect or be affected by the accomplishment of an organization’s objectives (Freeman 1984, 46). Moreover, this dilemma is surely not diminished by adding the public sector context in the picture; as public sector organizations set out to serve the interest of all citizens, practically anyone and everyone should accordingly be treated as a stakeholder (Nieminen 2000, 112). However, as Luoma-aho (2005, 109–110) points out, although the principle of equity in a democracy requires a same status for all citizens, the other side of the coin, that is the demand for meeting everyone’s different needs, makes some segmentation or grouping of stakeholders necessary also for public sector organizations.

By combining stakeholder theory, stakeholder management and public relations literature, Rawlins (2006) proposes a four-step model for prioritizing stakeholders. The four steps include: 1) identifying stakeholders according to their relationship with the organization, 2) prioritizing

stakeholders according to their attributes, 3) prioritizing stakeholders by their relationship to the situation and 4) prioritizing stakeholders according to the communication strategy.

As a first step, Rawlins (2006, 3) suggests the linkage model by Grunig and Hunt (1984 according to Esmen 1972) that according to him represents one of the few examples of identifying stakeholders according to their relationship with the organization. According to this model, organization is linked to its environment in four principal ways, as explained earlier: through enabling, functional, normative and diffused linkages. Diffused linkages may change according to the situation but enabling, functional and normative linkages are more permanent (Rawlins 2006, 5).

In the next step, Rawlins (2006) proposes prioritizing stakeholders according to the attributes of power, legitimacy and urgency, explained earlier, by Mitchell et al. (1997). Power refers to the ability of stakeholders to influence other parties to make decisions they would not otherwise make, or to impose their will in a relationship (Rawlins 2006, 5; Mitchell et al. 1997, 865). Legitimacy, on the contrary, exists when a stakeholder has a claim, legal, moral or presumed, which can influence the organization (Rawlins 2006, 5). It can be defined as “a generalized perception or an assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate” (Suchman 1995, 574). Finally, urgency exists under two conditions: “1) when a relationship or claim is of a time-sensitive nature and 2) when that relationship or claim is important or critical to the stakeholder” (Mitchell et al. 1997, 867).

Urgency is an attribute that increases the priority of any stakeholder group. As Rawlins (2006, 6) points out, urgency has particular importance for the public relations function: “it is the urgent public that often attracts the attention of media and other stakeholders”. Moreover, an important issue of the model is the variability of each attribute, power, legitimacy or urgency. Hence, latent stakeholders could easily become definitive stakeholders as it has been the case with some activist groups acquiring consumer and government support for their cause – by joining their forces with powerful and legitimate groups, enabling and functional linkages, as Rawlins explains. (Rawlins 2006, 7–9.)

Therefore, it is important to take into account possible changes in the situation, which stresses the importance of monitoring activities. Monitoring, or scanning, which can be part of issues management, involves identifying weak signals, issues and other developments in the organizational environment which might influence the organization (Juholin 2006, 334). Moreover, the attempt of less powerful and influential of stakeholders to cooperate with enabling and functional linkages in order to rise in priority brings into the picture the role of networks, and “third-party involvement”,

as pointed out by Rawlins (2006, 8). Networks are explained in more detail in chapter 3.5.

A dimension that Rawlins (2006) points out to be missing from the model of Mitchell et al. (1997) is supportiveness of stakeholder groups. Also Vos and Schoemaker (2006) suggest mapping the level of opposition versus support in further analyzing the “field of forces”. Thus, they propose a diagram with two dimensions, the second being passivity versus activity of stakeholders – an issue that Rawlins relates to step three of his model. (Vos & Schoemaker 2006, 94–95.)

Step three in Rawlins’ (2006) model includes prioritizing stakeholders by their relationship to the situation. This step is based on J. E. Grunig’s situational theory that explains activity versus passivity of publics. According to the situational theory, whether publics become active depends on the extent to which they perceive organization’s actions involve them, to what degree they perceive consequences of those actions as problematic, and whether they feel constrained from doing something about it – level of involvement, problem recognition and constraint recognition. Accordingly, publics can be described as non-publics, latent publics, aware publics and active publics. (Grunig & Repper 1992, 125.) Non-publics do not face a problem (Grunig 1983 in Rawlins 2006, 9). Latent publics might recognize the problem but do not see how it involves them or consider it problematic. Aware publics may face the problem but are limited by lower levels of involvement and problem recognition, or high constraint recognition. Active publics generally have high levels of involvement and problem recognition versus low constraint recognition. (Rawlins 2006, 9–10.)

Besides this more general division of publics, publics can also be grouped and described according to issues they are involved with. All-issue publics are active on all issues while apathetic publics to none. Single-issue publics are involved with a limited subset of issues that have interest for them only or a minor part of the population. Hot-issue publics are involved in a single issue with the majority of the population as well as media highly interested. (Grunig & Repper 1992, 139.)

In sum, according to Rawlins, active publics have the highest priority due to the urgency of their matter. Furthermore, publics that belong to the category of diffused linkages are more likely to be single-issue or hot-issue publics that have priority only until the problem is solved. Finally, enabling and functional linkages generally become active on issues that affect them but may become also multiple-issue publics due to the closeness of their relationship with the organization. Definitive stakeholders who are also active publics represent the priority over other publics. (Rawlins 2006, 10–11.)

The third step of Rawlins' model is useful as it underlines the importance of analyzing stakeholders according to situations that vary and change over time. In fact, also Vos and Schoemaker (2006, 94) suggest beside a more general stakeholder analysis an analysis per issue including, for example, level of knowledge, involvement and resistance of the groups involved. As Rawlins (2006, 11) points out, it may well happen that active publics are not definitive stakeholders although it would be convenient if they always did. Consequently, it is not enough to rely on communicating with the customary key constituencies. This study does not include a situational analysis of stakeholder groups as such. Nevertheless, as the context in which the case organizations operate includes a major change process – a topic that has a potential of being perceived as an issue by the stakeholders, situational theory by Grunig is good to keep in mind in the analysis stage of the interviews.

The fourth step in Rawlins' (2006) model includes prioritizing publics by communication strategies designed to mediate issues with priority publics according to their level of activity and supportiveness. Priority publics include stakeholders whose participation and cooperation is crucial for the organization to achieve its goals, and who have the highest priority according to for example their power/dependency/influence attributes, the urgency of an issue and the level of involvement in the issue. In addition to the priority publics, intervening publics, who mediate the information or act as opinion leaders, as well as influentials, who might not be stakeholders themselves but affect the interpretation of the message by the priority publics through their opinions, need to be considered with regard to the application of communication strategies. (Rawlins 2006, 11–13.) This fourth step will not be explained in detail, as the present study does not go as far as the formulation of communication strategies. However, this step can represent a further step for the case organization to be considered once this study is completed, stakeholders mapped and interviewed, for implementing and putting the results of this study into practice.

3.4 Criticism on the Stakeholder Model

According to Fassin (2008), the popularity of the stakeholder framework may be in part due to its visual or graphical representation (compare figure 2). However, the stakeholder model and its visual presentation have not only received support and credit but have also been a target of wide scholarly debate and criticism. Fassin reviews this criticism illustrating it on the level of the graphical framework of the model. Firstly, stakeholder groups are not always homogenous entities but each of them generally consists of different subgroups with different or even conflicting interests, objectives, agendas and priorities. Second, the picture does not illustrate the possibility of one

individual belonging to several stakeholder groups simultaneously. Third, there are differences in dependence among various stakeholders; arrows between the organization and each stakeholder group, indicating this dependence as well as reciprocity, give a misleading idea of similar and equal relationships. Fourth, the importance and impact, power and influence of each stakeholder group is different – unlike in the picture that relates an identical circle or oval for all the groups. Fifth, according to the picture, stakeholders have relations with the organization but in reality, many times they deal with the representatives of the organization instead. Consequently, Fassin suggests replacing the organization at the centre of the picture with the management. (Fassin 2008, 879–883.)

Another way to look at it is to see that, depending also on the type of the organization, different stakeholder groups deal with different people and different departments of one organization. In fact, Freeman (1984, 227) himself suggested in the implementation phase of the stakeholder approach drawing different kinds of maps, for example, one for the marketing unit where the marketing manager is in the middle, including possibly some internal stakeholder groups as well – a remark made by Fassin (2008, 883, 886) also. Vos and Schoemaker (2005, 47), on the other hand, suggest placing employees at the centre in order to show that they are the ones who actually maintain the relationship.

Finally, the model does not include the dimension of multiple linkages between different stakeholder groups as the picture seemingly suggests that stakeholders are not connected to each other. In consequence, this remark of multiple connections between stakeholders and their own subsets of stakeholders paves the way for the network model of stakeholder theory. (Fassin 2008, 883–884.) For example, Rowley (1997) and Key (1999) have called for this approach – “moving beyond the analysis of dyadic relationships” (Rowley 1997, 906).

Some additional points of criticism, reviewed by Fassin (2008, 885–886), include the levels of the organization’s environment and the dynamic aspect of stakeholders and the environment. Due to an inadequate description of the system in which the organization operates, the model is limited on one level of analysis: the relationship between an organization and a stakeholder (Key 1999, 323). However, the environment is not monolithic but, instead, consists of layers. Fassin (2008) gives as an example the new stakeholder view by Post, Preston and Sachs (2002, 9–10) that depicts the firm with three concentric circles around: resource base, industry structure and social political arena.

The model missing a dynamic aspect, on the other hand, creates an impression of the environment as static (Key 1999, 323; Fassin 2008, 885). Suggestions for covering this gap from different scholars, as referred to also

by Fassin (2008), include, for example, incorporating the dimension of change into stakeholder relationships (Friedman & Miles 2002) and relating the importance of certain stakeholder groups over some others to the lifecycles of an organization (Jawahar & McLaughlin 2001). Key (1999, 323), on the contrary, mentions the network model as a way out of the static picture. Moreover, the concept of “field of forces” introduced by Vos and Schoemaker (2005) seeks to cover some of the previously outlined gaps. Stressing the complexity of the context where communication of an organization takes place, it adds in the traditional stakeholder model different developments – for example, political, economic, social and technological – that shape the organizational environment. Moreover, various networks in which an organization operates are mentioned as further complicating the picture of an organization’s environment. (Vos & Schoemaker 2005, 21–22.)

Nevertheless, an important issue is mentioned by Fassin (2008, 885) – namely, also Freeman (1984, 57) in his criticized seminal writings warned about the simplifications of the stakeholder view that depicts stakeholders as static “whereas in reality, they change over time, and their stakes change depending on the strategic issue under consideration”. In fact, Fassin (2008, 886) concludes that Freeman’s model can still be considered “a good approximation” of the reality when the previous clarifications are taken into account. Moreover, also Freeman (1984, 55–69) talked about multiple stakes, stakeholder role sets and networks of stakeholders as well as analyzing stakeholders on multiple dimensions, such as stake and power, and environmental scanning. Drawing his conclusions from the visual or graphical examination of the model, Fassin adds that including all the various aspects, as discussed above, in one model would make the model “opaque and confusing” while “its pedagogical value” would consequently be lost (Fassin 2008, 884).

In sum, as also Fassin mentions, the simplicity of Freeman’s model can be regarded as an asset and considered a starting point for investigating stakeholder relations. In addition, the other issues discussed before – heterogeneity within stakeholder groups, multiple role sets, varying degrees of dependence, salience and influence, multiple linkages, networks, different levels of the organizational environment as well as the dynamic aspect of the environment – are important factors to be equally considered.

3.5 Stakeholder Networks

Communication in networks is currently increasing in importance (Monge & Contractor 2003; Vos & Schoemaker 2005). According to Vos and Schoemaker (2005, 158), this is especially true in the field of governmental

communication where cooperation between different parties is needed for solving social problems. This is valid also for the present study where networks become relevant from the perspective of the merging regional state administration where the creation and functioning of new state authorities will require cooperation of several formerly separate organizations. Moreover, as explained in the previous chapter, networks have been suggested as a way to deepen the stakeholder perspective to include multiple linkages and the dynamic aspect of the environment (Freeman 1984; Rowley 1997; Key 1999; Fassin 2008).

In the simplest way, "a network consists of a system of links among components", such as individuals, work groups or organizations (Miller 2006, 87). From a communication perspective, networks consist of "regular communication between two or more participants" (Hanneman & McEwen 1975, 42 in Vos & Schoemaker 2005, 151), in other words, they are created when people communicate with each other and form relationships (Cheney et al. 2004, 157). Monge and Contractor (2003, 3) speak of communication networks understood as "patterns of contact" that the flow of messages among participants creates.

Vos and Schoemaker (2005 citing Schuringa 1992, 143) describe different types of networks. Issue-networks are created around organizations and groups that share a concern for a same problem for which they would like to take action. Issue networks can sometimes turn into organizational networks that are based on a more permanent form of cooperation by organizations and groups. Social networks consist of more informal groupings of people, such as family and friends, which may exist also long periods. Support networks, such as telephone rings and self-help groups, consist of individuals and informal groups. (Vos & Schoemaker 2005, 151.)

Networks can be described on at least three levels, explained by Miller: properties of the entire network, properties of network links and network roles. Properties of a network include, for example, network content, that is, the content of the flow within a network. Network density, on the other hand, indicates the volume of a network on the level of how many or few interconnections there are between members of a network. The level of analysis can be, for example, within one organization, as in the case of intraorganizational networks, or in the connections between organizations, referred to as interorganizational networks. (Miller 2006, 87–88.)

Relations that connect members of a network, referred to also as nodes in a network analysis, can be called links or ties. These links are characterized by different properties, one of them being strength, which indicates "the quantity of the relation". (Monge & Contractor 2003, 35). The strength of a tie can be defined as "a combination of the amount of time, the emotional

intensity, the intimacy, and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie" (Granovetter 1973, 1361).

The theory of the strength of weak ties by Granovetter (1973, 1974, 1982 in Monge & Contractor 2003) offers some insight into tie strength with regard to information acquisition. Based on his studies on job search, Granovetter theorized that less frequent contacts, i.e. weak ties, are more likely to offer unique information, making them "information rich". Strong ties, on the contrary, lead to "information and attitudinal similarity" because of primary group members communicating same things with same people. (Monge & Contractor 2003, 147.) As a result of a growing importance of virtual spaces, it could be that the scope and range of weak ties will increase in the future (Monge & Contractor 2003, 149). As an example, many organization–stakeholder relations could take place in the cyberspace becoming cyber relationships (Grunig & Hon 1999, 39).

Symmetry, on the other hand, refers to the nature of a communication link – whether two people share a similar relationship with one another. Supervisor–subordinate relationship would be, for example, asymmetrical. (Miller 2006, 88.) Relations can also be directional or non-directional the latter representing, for example, a shared partnership. Finally, when relations are studied one at a time, or one type of content at a time, they are uniplex relations while two or more studied at once are called multiplex relations (Monge & Contractor 2003, 35; Miller 2006, 88). Moreover, describing network roles involves looking at individual actors and how they are connected to each other within a network (Miller 2006, 88). For example, communications personnel are called boundary spanners who act as intermediaries between the organization and the environment (Vos & Schoemaker 2005, 152). Media, on the contrary, are often called gatekeepers – actors who control or mediate the link between one network and another (Brass 1995 in Monge & Contractor 2003, 32).

3.6 Systems Theory

Stakeholder theory can be considered to reflect a systems perspective of organizations and public relations. According to the systems approach, organizations can be considered "complex organisms" which interact with their environments in order to survive (Miller 2006, 71). In other words, systems perspective applies when organizations and their publics are considered to have mutually dependant relationships (Cutlip et al. 2006, 176). This is especially relevant in a society, such as the current, where mutual dependency between an organization and its environment is increasing (Vos & Schoemaker 2005, 13).

Cutlip et al. (2006, 176) define system as “a set of interacting units that endures through time within an established boundary by responding and adjusting to change pressures from the environment to achieve and maintain goal states”. The basic idea behind is that systems consist of mutually bound elements and entities (Vos & Schoemaker 2005, 156). In an organization, it could be the various, interrelated units and subunits that further interact with various stakeholders in the organizational environment. A metaphor of a human body with various organs and functions well encapsulates the concept of a system and is often used beside (Miller 2006, 73).

Systems are characterized by certain features. Hierarchical ordering refers to systems not being random collections of components but, rather, ordered and arranged, involving subsystems and suprasystems. Interdependence of various components of a system implies that the functioning of the whole system is dependent on its parts. An example could be the world economy that is currently hit by a recession involving all the countries of the world. Permeability of boundaries, on the other hand, refers to a system being open to material and information flows in and out, both in its relation with the environment as well as with the components inside. (Miller 2006, 73–74.) In this respect, organizations can be called open or closed systems, the former allowing message flows to permeate their boundaries while the latter are closed within themselves (Vos & Schoemaker 2005, 157).

Also networks can be considered systems – systems can involve networks and networks can connect systems with other systems (Vos & Schoemaker 2005, 156–157). Finally, systems theory is reflected also in the relationship perspective of public relations (Ledingham 2006, 466) – the topic of the following chapter.

4 PUBLIC RELATIONS AS STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

The relationship perspective of public relations is based on an assumption that “public relations balances the interests of organizations and publics through the management of organization–public relationships” (Ledingham 2003, 181). Accordingly, public relations can be defined as “the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends” (Cutlip et al. 2006, 5). Consequently, the relationship management perspective implies a move away from measuring communication impacts, such as quantities of messages or news coverage, towards evaluating the quality of the relationship between an organization and its publics, the product of public relations initiatives. Considered a management function, strategic planning is central to it, involving analysis, planning, implementation and evaluation of public relations initiatives. From this perspective, communication is understood as a tool for creating and maintaining organization–public relationships. (Ledingham 2006, 465–466.)

This chapter first describes the relational perspective in public relations. Next, it presents how the quality of relationships can be assessed including relevant relationship outcomes and types of relationships. In addition, communication with stakeholders is explained together with asymmetrical and symmetrical approaches of public relations. Moreover, communication of public sector organizations is described including public sector communication in the Finnish context. Finally, this chapter presents stakeholder perceptions and explains the underlying perceptual process, influences on perceptions as well as selective perception.

4.1 The Relational Perspective in Public Relations

The introduction of the relational perspective in public relations is associated to Ferguson (1984) who claimed that the new paradigm focus of the field should be on relationships – not on the organization, on the public, nor on the communication process, but on the relationship between organizations and their publics (Grunig & Huang 2000, 23). Soon after that, definitions of public relations based on the relational approach started to emerge, followed by attempts by various scholars to further explore the topic. For example, Grunig (1992, 20) described public relations in terms of “building relationships with publics that constrain or enhance the ability of the organization to meet its mission”. (Ledingham & Bruning 2000, xiii.)

According to Bruning, Dials and Shirka (2008, 26), research that appeared since the initial emergence of the relationship perspective has focused on three main areas: 1) defining organization–public relationship, 2) relating organization–public relationships to important organizational outcomes and 3) quantifying relationship quality. Some points that the literature on organization–public relationships has in common include multidisciplinary perspective as it draws from various disciplines, such as interpersonal communication, relationship building, organizational behaviour, marketing and social psychology. In addition, it is concerned with the purpose, direction, planning, execution and evaluation of public relations taking into consideration the notion of mutual benefit. (Ledingham & Bruning 2000, xiv.) Moreover, most of the literature has systems theory as an overarching point and is consistent with the two-way symmetrical model of public relations by Grunig and Hunt (1984), explained in chapter 4.3.1. (Ledingham 2003, 181). The relationship perspective to public relations has been referred to also as a co-creational approach and is predicted to be the foundation for future developments in the field (Botan & Hazleton 2006, 7).

Ledingham (2003, 195) in articulating a theoretical statement of relationship management as a general theory of public relations, proposes a set of axioms of organization–public relationships based on a review of relevant literature:

1. Organization–public relationships are transactional.
2. The relationships are dynamic; they change over time.
3. They are goal oriented.
4. Organization–public relationships have antecedents and consequences and can be analyzed in terms of relationship quality, maintenance strategies, relationship type, and actors in the relationship.
5. These relationships are driven by the perceived needs and wants of interacting organizations and publics.
6. The continuation of organization–public relationships is dependent on the degree to which expectations are met.
7. Those expectations are expressed in interactions between organizations and publics.

8. Such relationships involve communication, but communication is not the sole instrument of relationship building.
9. These relationships are impacted by relational history, the nature of the transaction, the frequency of exchange, and reciprocity.
10. Organization–public relationships can be described by type (personal, professional, community, symbolic, and behavioral) independent of the perceptions of those relationships.
11. The proper focus of the domain of public relations is relationships, not communication.
12. Communication alone cannot sustain long-term relationships in the absence of supportive organizational behavior.
13. Effective management of organization–public relationships supports mutual understanding and benefit.
14. The relationship perspective is applicable throughout the public relations process and with regard to all public relations techniques.

For this study, the relational perspective is considered useful for understanding and assessing relationships between stakeholders and public sector organizations. Moreover, the quality of relationships is understood as an indicator of the success of the communication and public relations function of an organization. Linked to this is an assumption that the value of public relations for an organization lies in its capacity to build quality relationships with strategic constituencies, publics that are central given the mission and goals of the organization. (Grunig & Hon 1999, 8–9, 11.)

4.2 Quality of Relationships

In the line of research focused on quantifying relationship quality (Bruning et al. 2008, 26), Grunig and Hon (1999) described certain relationship indicators that could be used for assessing the quality of relationships. Grunig (2002) later on completed the first quantitative measurements with qualitative methods. Grunig and Huang (2000) described these indicators, also called relationship outcomes, along with a three-stage model about organization–public relationships, reconceptualized on the basis of Broom et al.'s (1997) model on relationship concepts, antecedents to relationships and consequences of relationships.

The antecedents in Broom et al.'s (2000, 16) model are “sources of change, pressure, or tension on the system derived from the environment” including, for example, social and cultural norms, perceptions and expectations, needs for resources, perceptions of uncertain environment, and legal or voluntary necessity that explain why organizations enter into relationships with publics. Grunig and Huang (2000, 34), on the other hand, speak of situational antecedents referring to those publics, organizations and coalitions that antecede a relationship. In other words, antecedents for them describe those publics with which organizations need relationships. The relationship itself, referred to as the relationship concept, Broom et al. (2000, 15) understand as

the “exchange or transfer of information, energy or resources”. Grunig and Huang (2000, 29, 34), instead, speak of strategies to maintain the relationship including symmetrical and asymmetrical strategies.

Finally, the consequences of relationships for Broom et al. (2000, 16) include goal achievement, dependency/loss of autonomy as well as routine and institutionalized behaviour. The outcomes of relationships according to Grunig and Hon (1999), and Grunig and Huang (2000), are described in more detail next. They were found useful for this study, interested in perceptions of stakeholders on the communication and relationships, as they not only describe the outcomes of relationships but also suggest relevant methods for assessing the relationship quality (see also Grunig 2002). According to Grunig and Huang (2000, 47), the starting point for measuring relationship outcomes is to ask the stakeholders and/or the organization to describe the different features of the relationships. This perspective was applied in the empirical part of this study, explained in the Methodology chapter.

Furthermore, after initial one-party perceptions, Grunig and Huang suggest moving on to coorientational measures of the relationship by management and publics, including perceptions of both parties, predictions about the perceptions of the other party as well as third-party observations. In addition, they propose environmental scanning for the situational antecedents and ongoing observations of management and publics for the maintenance strategies. (Grunig & Huang 2000, 34, 47.)

4.2.1 Relationship Outcomes

Relationship outcomes, as explained by Grunig and Huang (2000, 42) after reviewing some previous literature, include control mutuality, trust, commitment and satisfaction. First, control mutuality can be described as “the degree to which the parties in a relationship are satisfied with the amount of control they have over a relationship” (Grunig 2002, 2). It reflects the asymmetry of power in organization–public relationships, which is unavoidable. However, for the relationship to remain positive and stable some degree of control mutuality should exist among the parties. (Grunig & Huang 2000, 42, 44.)

Trust, on the other hand, reflects the level of “one’s confidence in and willingness to open oneself to the other party” (Grunig & Huang 2000, 44). Trust has several components. According to Grunig and Hon (1999, 19), three are especially relevant: 1) integrity, “the belief that an organization is fair and just”, 2) dependability, “the belief that an organization will do what it says it will do” and 3) competence, “the belief that an organization has the ability to do what it says it will do”.

Commitment is defined here as “the extent to which both parties believe and feel that the relationship is worth spending energy on to maintain and promote” (Grunig 2002, 2). According to Grunig and Huang (2000, 46), commitment has two aspects relevant for an organization–public relationship: affective commitment and continuance commitment. While the former refers to an affective or an emotional approach towards the relationship, the latter means commitment to continue a certain line of action. Although measuring organizational commitment has traditionally been focused on affective commitment, Grunig and Huang (2000, 46) suggest in line with Meyer and Allen (1984 in Grunig & Huang 2000, 46) that both affective and continuance commitment should be considered outcomes of public relations.

Finally, satisfaction is defined as “the extent to which both parties feel favourably about each other because positive expectations about the relationship are reinforced” (Grunig 2002, 2). Reviewing some previous literature, Grunig and Huang (2000, 45) propose that satisfaction is probably the most significant indicator of effective relationship maintenance; it reflects a belief from both parties that the other is willing to engage in positive measures to keep up and look after the relationship (Grunig 2002, 2).

4.2.2 Types of Relationships

In addition to the previously outlined four relationship indicators, Grunig and Hon (1999) described yet another pair of relational outcomes for assessing the quality of relationships drawing from psychology literature on relationships: exchange vs. communal relationship – two different types of relationships (Grunig 2002, 1). First, an exchange relationship is based on an exchange of benefits: one party is willing to engage in cooperation and give benefits to the other because it has received an equal amount of benefits and initiatives for cooperation from the other party in the past or it is expected to do so in the future. Exchange being a central concept in marketing theory, it is at the heart of marketing relationships between organizations and customers. (Grunig & Hon 1999, 20.) A communal relationship, on the contrary, is based on mutual providing of benefits from both parties without expectations from the other. Underlying is a concern for the welfare of the other even when nothing is got in return. (Grunig 2002, 1.) According to Grunig and Hon (1999, 21), the role of public relations professionals is to convince management that communal relationships with stakeholders are needed. For example, they are a key for socially responsible behaviour and add value to stakeholder organizations as well as society at large.

Citing Clark and Mills (1993), who originally developed these two concepts, Grunig and Hon (1999, 21), however, point out that communal relationships are not only altruistic but through communal relationships, other goals can

be attained. In the case of an organization, concern for the welfare of stakeholders might result in reputation benefits, which in turn could help the organization to gain support from its stakeholders and that way to achieve its long-term objectives. Moreover, exchange relationships as such are not bad or to be avoided. (Grunig & Hon 1999, 21.) In fact, often relationships start through exchanges and gradually turn into communal relationships, although the opposite could happen too (Clark & Mills 1993 in Grunig & Hon 1999, 21). Nevertheless, the ability to build communal relationships is central to public relations profession further differentiating it from other similar fields like marketing. Finally, Grunig and Hon suggest that the success of public relations can be measured through "the degree to which a public believes it has a communal relationship with an organization". (Grunig & Hon 1999, 22.)

More recently, Hung (2005) has argued that in addition to these two types of relationships, there are also other types of relationships, such as manipulative, contractual and covenantal relationships. Different types of relationships form a continuum from exploitative relationships, where the focus is on thinking of oneself only, to one-sided communal relationships, where the behaviour is based on thinking only about others. Neither one of the extremes is recommended for organizations. (Hung 2005, 415–416.)

4.3 Communicating with Stakeholders

Communication can be understood as a process through which "verbal and non-verbal messages are used to create and share meaning" (Frey, Botan & Kreps 2000, 28). In addition, it is a reciprocal process conditioned by the relationship and social context the communicators are situated in (Cutlip et al. 2006, 197). These descriptions include the two perspectives communication is often explained with: communication as dissemination of information and communication as creation of shared meanings (Frey et al. 2000, 28; Juholin 2006, 30). The former, referred to also as the information exchange perspective, is interested in communication as a tool through which a sender conveys a message to a receiver who reacts (Frey et al. 2000, 27). This model, also known as Shannon and Weaver's model, however, does not tell the whole truth about communication, which is more complicated than the simple act of sending a message (Cutlip et al. 2006, 197).

The so-called meaning based perspective into communication, on the other hand, considers not only the process of message exchange but takes into account also the big picture involved (Frey et al. 2000, 28; Vos & Schoemaker 2005, 17). First of all, the senders and receivers have their own existing knowledge and experiences, values, standards, ideas and feelings which shape the process of encoding, expressing a message in terms of a verbal and

non-verbal content, and decoding, translating a message according to their own understanding (Vos & Schoemaker 2005, 17). Decoding and encoding, thus, involve interpretation, attributing of meanings and reactions that differ from a person to another (Cutlip et al. 2000, 199). In addition, the channel that is used for conveying a message influences communication; whereas a channel connotes a one-way information transfer, a forum involves a shared space or situation where things are discussed, not only informed about (Juholin 2006, 118).

Moreover, the big picture includes also contextual factors. For example, communicators share a relationship which could be intimate and close, formal and distant, competitive or conflictual. In addition, communication takes place in a wider social environment or setting including social and cultural norms and values. (Cutlip et al. 2000, 201, 202.) The communication process may also involve problems, such as information overload, distortion or ambiguity, further complicating it. Distortion refers to noise that may affect processing of the message from the side of the receiver. Noise can be semantic, related to differing meanings, physical, such as a disturbing sound, or contextual, related to differing perspectives emerging from personal factors that influence the context. (Eisenberg & Goodall 2004, 23–24.) Furthermore, there is often a multiplicity of both messages and communicators who continuously change their roles as senders and receivers (Vos & Schoemaker 2005, 18). In sum, communication is a multifaceted and a multidimensional process.

4.3.1 From Asymmetrical to Symmetrical Communication

Stakeholder theory is often associated with the ideal of symmetrical, interactive communication (Lehtonen 1998, 138). The division of public relations into symmetrical and asymmetrical communication has its roots in the so-called four models of public relations, used to describe both current practices as well as historical development of public relations, developed by Grunig and Hunt in 1984. The four models include press agency/publicity model, public information model, two-way asymmetrical model and two-way symmetrical model. (Grunig & Grunig 1992, 287–289.)

The first model, press agency model, is based on seeking publicity in the media at almost any cost (Grunig & White 1992, 39). According to Lehtonen, the publicity model is typical of advertising and sales promotion. The information may even be propagandist where truthfulness is not a central factor. (Lehtonen 1998, 129.) Public information, on the other hand, is journalism-type communication where information, although mainly favourable for the organization, is disseminated to the publics (Grunig & White 1992, 39). According to Lehtonen (1998, 129), the main purpose of the

public information model is to inform the publics, which is typical of the communication of public officials and public sector organizations in general.

With the two-way asymmetrical model, the organization uses research and monitoring methods to meet the information needs of the receivers. However, the purpose is to persuade publics to behave as the organization wants without engaging in real interaction, in a way that the control remains in the hands of the organization. (Grunig & White 1992, 39; Lehtonen 1998, 129). Finally, the two-way symmetrical model is based on research and dialogue to manage conflict, enhance understanding and build relationships. Both parties can be persuaded and change themselves. (Grunig & White 1992, 39.) The purpose is to create mutual understanding and enhance trust between the parties (Lehtonen 1998, 131).

While the first three models represent asymmetrical approach, the two-way symmetrical model corresponds with a symmetrical approach. Asymmetry can be considered an attempt to change behaviour of publics without changing the organization itself, thus indicating an imbalance in the communication between the parties. Symmetrical communication, on the other hand, shows a willingness to adjust the relationship. In addition, whereas the first two models represent a one-way approach, the two latter correspond with a two-way approach. One-way communication is based on a monologue while two-way communication requires a dialogue. These two aspects, one-way vs. two-way and asymmetrical vs. symmetrical, represent two variables that underlie the four models: direction and purpose. (Grunig & White 1992, 39; Grunig & Grunig 1992, 289.)

It is the two-way symmetrical model that is often presented as an ideal of the direction in which public relations should further develop (Grunig & Grunig 1992, 290). More recently, however, a perspective that there is no single model that suits all situations, but rather the choice of appropriate communication strategies is situational (Van Ruler 2004) has accompanied this view. In fact, also Grunig (2001, 25) later on added that his models should be regarded as contingent, describing the two-way symmetrical model as "a mixed motive game" in which both asymmetrical and symmetrical strategies can be used.

In fact, the four models of public relations have received wide criticism and have been a target of extensive scholarly debate, recognized also by the authors and contributors of the models themselves (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier 2002, 307). More recently, Laskin (2009) has reviewed the criticism. For example, evidence shows that the two-way symmetrical model is not widely practised in the public relations field. Consequently, the models and the underlying "Excellence theory" have been described as normative rather than a description of the field. In other words, the models represent an ideal

which in reality, however, is difficult to achieve and may not fit all situations. This can be criticized for not being encouraging for practitioners themselves as their practice of public relations is considered from the side of scholars inferior to how it should be. (Laskin 2009, 45.)

Moreover, some critical and postmodern scholars have questioned the value of symmetry as an ideal end product of public relations practice, as well as the contribution of two-way symmetrical model to creating equal participation and benefits among all parties involved. Some have gone so far as to equal the symmetrical model with “a strategy for hegemony”, a process that often leads to “a compromise to deflect criticism and maintain power relations” (Roper 2005, 69). In addition, the models have been criticized for not considering the measurements of the relational aspect of public relations. Related to methodological and measurement problems, direction (one-way vs. two-way) and especially purpose (asymmetrical vs. symmetrical), regarded as dichotomous dimensions, have given rise to some confusion and debate. (Laskin 2009, 46–50.)

Despite this criticism, the four models are still widely used in public relations theory (e.g. Botan & Hazleton 2006), and they are useful in describing different forms and dimensions of communication that organizations practise vis-à-vis their stakeholders, combined with an understanding that the choice of communication strategies can be situational (Van Ruler 2004). Moreover, the ideal of two-way symmetrical communication is reflected also in the recommendations that guide governmental communication in Finland, which has as one purpose to enhance interaction and participation among citizens and other stakeholders (Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2002). In addition, although criticized as utopian, the ideal of symmetrical, interactive communication can be regarded also as a goal for the future (Kiiskinen 2001, 102). The shift from one-way communication towards a two-way approach and a dialogue also further stresses the importance of relationships between an organization and its stakeholders (Luoma-aho 2005, 124) – the focus of the present study.

4.3.2 Communication of Public Sector Organizations

There seem to be differing ideas about whether communication in the public and private sectors differ from one another. For example, the studies of Grunig, Grunig and Dozier (Grunig & Jaatinen 1999, 220 in Eskelinen 2005, 36–37) showed only small differences between public and private organizations with regard to communication tools and methods. In fact, the majority of current public relations models do not distinguish between the public and private sectors, but instead same models are applied to both sectors (Liu & Horsley 2007, 378). However, according to some scholars, because of the unique characteristics that differentiate public sector

organizations from their private counterparts, also communication in the two sectors should be evaluated differently (e.g. Gelders et al. 2007; Liu & Horsley 2007; Nieminen 2000).

One of the early descriptions of public communication is by Abrahamsson, dating back to the 1970's. According to the principle of open access (offentlighetsprincipen), public officials do not actively communicate but instead shift the responsibility to citizens to seek after information themselves. Access to information is open, but information is provided only reactively. Along with the principle of information (informationsprincipen), on the other hand, public officials try to make information more available for the public and actively disseminate information. The timing, content, channel and information needs of the receivers are taken into account. Third, the principle of communication (kommunikationsprincipen) implies that both citizens and officials are active and equal senders, and receivers of information in an ongoing process of mutual information exchange and interaction. (Abrahamsson 1974, 181–191 in Hakala 2000, 87–88; Abrahamsson 1976, 184–187.)

Nieminen (2000) describes public sector communication with the help of two concepts, strategic and communicative action, based on the thinking of Habermas (1984). Strategic action is goal-oriented and strives for influencing others in a way that the desired goals can be achieved. Communicative action, on the other hand, aims at creating mutual understanding among the members of a community and conditions under which each member of the community has an equal opportunity to participate in the public debate. Although communicative action, in principal, is typical of public bodies and agencies, whose communication is based on equality of all parties, is open to all and consensus-oriented, also public sector communication has strategic features and goals. (Nieminen 2000, 109–110, 116–117.) Examples on strategic action could be persuading citizens to vote and to comply with the law, or educating them to act in an environmentally friendly way.

The difference between communicative and strategic action can be further explained with the two functions that public institutions are in charge of: legislation and execution. On one hand, there is legislative power, which in a democratic society belongs to all citizens involving public debate, formulation of public will and decision making, and reflects, thus, the principle of communicative action. When it comes to execution, on the other hand, strategic action is needed to efficiently put into practice decisions, which are created as a result of legislative processes. This is done following the official hierarchy of public administration, guided by division of duties between different authorities as well as rules and regulations. The challenge, according to Nieminen, is that the line between communication that serves legislation and communication that serves execution is not always clear.

Moreover, communication should not be regarded merely as information dissemination but as an ongoing, open discourse to guarantee the principle of democracy. (Nieminen 2000, 116–119, 127–128.) According to Luoma-aho (2005, 117), it could be that due to managerialism and neoliberalism, the Finnish public sector organizations are gradually shifting their focus from communicative action to strategic action and becoming more businesslike.

Högström, on the other hand, divides official communication into 1) communication, which aims at informing about, guiding and supporting decisions, 2) service-oriented communication related to informing about public services and 3) image-based communication related to making the work of public officials known and building of a profile. The basic tasks of official communication, on the other hand, include providing information and increasing awareness, as well as influencing and changing attitudes and behaviours. (Högström 2002, 27–29.)

Vos (2006), while describing an instrument for assessing the communication quality of governmental organizations and councils, describes three functions of communication. While corporate communication is concerned with the presentation of the organization as a whole, organization related communication includes, for example, internal communication. Policy communication is related to “policy items” – making them public and explaining them. Moreover, it supports the realization of policy goals and facilitates policy development with citizens and other organizations through interactive policymaking. Each function is related to seven criteria according to which the quality of governmental communication can be measured: transparency, accessibility, publicity via the media, responsiveness, interactive policy, communication policy, as well as affectivity and efficiency of communication. (Vos 2006, 4–5.)

Liu and Horsley (2007) speak of interaction of the microenvironments when describing governmental communication, reflecting systems thinking, explained in chapter 3.6. Within each of the four microenvironments – multilevel, intergovernmental, intragovernmental and external microenvironment, described in chapter 2.2.2 – public communicators must choose the channel and the target of communication. One axis represents mediated communication, communication through the media, and the other represents direct communication to the publics (see figure 4). The intercept point in between represents the choice between mediated and direct communication, which further determines the appropriate communication channels. The intercept point changes according to the situation and communication goals. The boundaries between the microenvironments are permeable as the dashed arrows indicate. Moreover, communication can be either one-way or two-way, initiated by the governmental public relations

practitioner, the publics or the media, and either symmetrical or asymmetrical. (Liu & Horsley 2007, 387.)

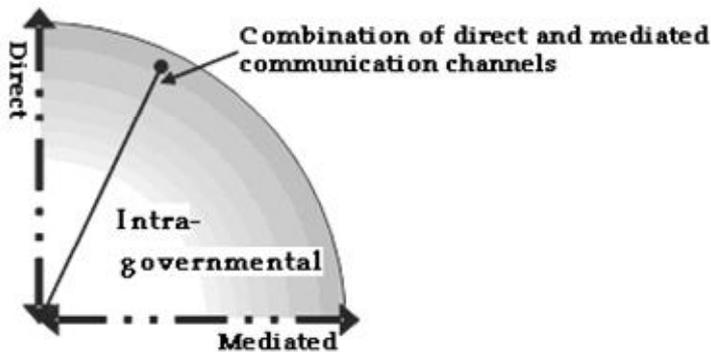


FIGURE 4 Communication in the Microenvironments (Liu & Horsley 2007, 387)

Moreover, public sector communication is guided by a set of laws, regulations, guides and publications, which differentiates it from communication in the private sector (Liu & Horsley 2007, 378; Luoma-aho 2005, 118).

4.3.3 Public Sector Communication in Finland

Hakala (2000, 89), describes the development of public communication in Finland after World War II. After a period of crisis communication, 1939–1951, involving war related propaganda, censorship and active public information, there was a period of quietude and passive complying with the information principle, 1952–1965. Related to the creation of the welfare state, a period of active information dissemination, 1965–1975, followed. Finally, via the introduction of the concept of customer, and an orientation on customer information needs, 1976–1986, public sector communication has developed towards the principle of openness, leading also to the first written instructions of official communication. (Hakala 2000, 89.)

According to Luoma-aho (2005, 118), patterns of communication have lately become more normative and have been given more importance in the Finnish public sector organizations mainly as a result of publication of influential guides for official communication. In Finland, the dissemination of information is guided by the following acts: Act on the Openness of Government Activities (621/1999), Constitution of Finland (731/1999), Administrative Procedure Act (434/2003), Personal Data Act (523/1999), Emergency Powers Act (1080/1991) and State of Defence Act (1083/1991). Moreover, the Decree on the Amendment of the Decree on the Openness of Government Activities and Good Data Management Practices (1030/1999) govern the organization of communication by state authorities. In addition, these regulations have been specified by a recommendation, which further

discusses and describes the aims, functions and principles of governmental communication. (Prime Minister's Office 2009; Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2002.)

Public communication in Finland is based on the basic rights defined by the Constitution. Related to communication are, for example, freedom of speech, protection of private life and publicity. (Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2002, 10; Juholin 2006, 66.) One of the most central of these basic rights is the right of all citizens to get information regarding public documents, referred to as the principle of publicity expressed in the Act on the Openness of Government Activities (621/1999) (Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2002, 10). It covers the responsibilities of public officials to produce and share information, including informing also about unfinished matters under preparation according to the principles of openness and good data management practices (Laki viranomaisen toiminnan julkisuudesta 621/1999, 3§, 19–20 §).

In addition to openness, citizen-centeredness, participation and interactivity are mentioned as goals or principles of governmental communication in Finland. Areas or emphases for further development include increasing interactivity, use of on-line communication and the supportive use of communication for management and other functions. As a starting point for official communication should be the needs and rights of the receivers. Moreover, it is through official communication that conditions for interaction between citizens, other organizations and communities, and the administration can be created and enhanced. As cases and issues involve different administrative fields, as well as other sectors of society, the need for cooperation between different actors is growing. Through collecting feedback, interactivity can be increased, and public discussion and participation supported. (Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2002, 11–13.) On the basis of this, it is almost needless to state the importance of stakeholder relations in the context of public sector communication.

Furthermore, other principles of governmental communication in Finland include trustworthiness, neutrality, timeliness and speed. In addition, different perspectives and parties in the process of communication should be equally considered. Moreover, the principle of openness and trustworthiness imply that communication should not be based only on positive matters. Finally, communication in the public sector is the duty and responsibility of every official. It can be divided into 1) informing – covering dissemination and mediation of information and 2) communication – including receiving, producing and sharing of information in interaction with various stakeholders to create meanings about matters that involve society. (Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2002, 7, 9, 14.) Accordingly, tasks public sector communication covers include informing, counselling and promoting of participation (Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2001, 15).

4.4 Stakeholder Perceptions

Greenberg and Baron (1995, 48), on the basis of Schiffmann (1993), define perception as “the process through which people select, organize and interpret information”. It can be understood as the process of making sense of the variety of inputs that come to people through their senses and consists of active information processing (Greenberg & Baron 1995, 48). Public perception, on the other hand, refers to “the way in which public groups perceive a subject”, for example an organization (Vos & Schoemaker 2006, 10). Perceptions of organizations, thus, are based on an active process of selecting, organizing and interpreting information about organizations from the side of their stakeholders – an interest of the present study.

For this study, knowledge about perceptions is useful as the empirical part of the study is focused on perceptions that stakeholders have about their communication and relationships with the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre. The concepts of image and reputation are not dealt with as both reputation and organizational image would involve looking at overall estimates various stakeholders hold about an organization rather than examining individual assessments as done in this study (Vuokko 2004; Luoma-aho 2005). Consequently, the following will focus on the processes that underlie perceptions as well those that influence them.

4.4.1 Perceptual Process

In order to understand perceptions of organizations, some knowledge about the process of perception in the human brain is needed. First, through human memory people associate meanings to organizations based on their previous experiences (Vos & Schoemaker 2006, 11). In fact, present impressions are influenced by the past, which acts as “a filter” shaping any new information according to prior experiences (Luoma-aho 2005, 174). Impressions drawn upon the memory also create a feeling of continuity and stability (Toskala 2002, 176). Past experiences related to dealing with an organization or its customer service are, thus, reactivated through interconnecting points in complex neuronal networks in the memory when re-entering into contact or hearing the name of the organization again (Toskala 2002, 176; Vos & Schoemaker 2006, 12). Memory serves also as a platform for learning new things and giving meaning to events and issues that people are confronted with (Vos & Schoemaker 2006, 12).

Moreover, through the psychological development, each human being has a set of individual knowledge structures, known as schemata, which guide the information processing (Toskala 2002, 159) and represent “organized knowledge of a concept or a stimulus” (Vos & Schoemaker 2002, 13).

Consequently, schemata reflect individual ways of organizing information. They can be either limited “inner maps” about a certain matter or larger structures involving both affective, emotion-based, and rational, thinking-based, knowledge. In some schemata, affective knowledge is dominating whereas in others rational knowledge is primary. (Toskala 2002, 159.) Vuokko (2004, 191) describes impressions of organizations as schemata which consist of imprints in the memory and associations that connect them. Schemata are activated through small cues (Toskala 2002, 159) as “automatic reminding processes” of past incidents (Vos & Schoemaker 2006, 13). They help the processing of information making it faster but, in the meantime, they can distort the information too (Toskala 2002, 159). Based on schemata, first impressions are generally strong and thus hard to change (Vos & Schoemaker 2006, 27). Nevertheless, images and perceptions do change and evolve over time, as they are not fixed and rigid, but dynamic, variable and context-bound (Oakes et al. 1994, 211; Vos & Schoemaker 2006, 27).

Perceptions are, thus, part of a wider processing of information where sense perceptions are processed in our brain through various stages into purposeful meanings (Goldstein 1999; Toskala 2002). Thereby, inner representations of the world and objects outside us represent individual cognitive structures of our mind and are shaped by them. These representations are created through observation, relating new information to previous knowledge and impressions, as well as interpreting information based on language and concepts. (Toskala 2002, 139–140, 156.) Vos and Schoemaker (2006, 13–14), on the other hand, speak of mental imagery involving verbal and visual processing of information.

Perceptions are influenced by many factors. Indeed, a great deal of perception is not based on what people, organizations or things actually are like, referred to as subject characteristics, but is shaped by characteristics and experiences of people perceiving those things, referred to as perceiver variables (Greenberg & Baron 1995, 49). In that way perceptions form “a reflection of reality” (Vos & Schoemaker 2006, 20) based on subjective impressions and insights (Vuokko 2004, 191) and guided by cultural and collective values (Toskala 2002, 157). Thus, they are not incorrect or false even if they do not match an image an organization, for example, would like to have about itself. Consequently, perceptions, impressions and images belong to people or stakeholders who hold them, not to the target itself. (Vuokko 2004, 191.) In fact, different individuals, or groups of stakeholders, may have very different images of one organization (Vos & Schoemaker 2002, 20; Vuokko 2004, 204–205). In this way, schemata or perceptions can be referred to also as “individual truths” which provide continuity and stability for personality and the self. What this implies for communication of an organization is that the communicator should try to identify potential stakeholders and their truths. (Toskala 2002, 161.)

The so-called perceptual biases include, for example, halo effect, similar-to-me effect and simple interference. Halo effect refers to the process of associating a positive impression on someone or something, based on previous experiences, as well as extending that impression also on those aspects that little or nothing is actually known about. The negative version of the halo effect is called horn effect or rusty effect. (Greenberg & Baron 1995, 50.) Similar-to-me effect, on the other hand, involves perceiving people who are similar in more favourable light than those who are different (Greenberg & Baron 1995, 50). Simple interference, on the other side, takes place when people perceive certain attributes of a company go hand in hand (Dowling 1988 in Vos & Schoemaker 2006, 22). Gaps in knowledge about a certain organization can be filled with an attribute that is known (Vos & Schoemaker 2006, 22). Moreover, images and perceptions are layered where, for example, the image of oneself, organizational image, sector image, town image and regional image interact and influence each other (Vuokko 2004, 200).

4.4.2 Selective Perception

Moreover, perception is a selective process. Perceptual selectivity, or selective perception, refers to the fact that we are not passive in recording and absorbing all the information that our senses are exposed to, but rather we construct “meaningful representations” which are based on some of the details of the world around us excluding others. This process of categorization of stimuli has a function too: without it, making sense would be difficult as we would need to react to every stimulus attracting our attention as a new experience. (Oakes et al. 1994, 107–108.) The selective process is related to both observation and interpretation of the observation itself and includes selective exposure, selective attention, selective comprehension, selective acceptance and selective retention (Engel et al. 1990 according to Vos & Schoemaker 2006, 23).

One product of the selective perception is a stereotype. Stereotypes can be understood as “social categorical judgements, perceptions of people in terms of their group membership” (Oakes et al. 1994, 211). They are based on an assumption that all members of certain groups share similar features and behaviours (Greenberg & Baron 1995, 51). Likewise, stereotypes can influence the way in which organizations are perceived resulting in a judgement on the basis of a branch image, for example. The individual sets of values, beliefs and needs, which shape our perception and which stereotypes are part of too, can be called frames of reference. (Vos & Schoemaker 2006, 23.)

Furthermore, another concept that explains the way in which our perception of an organization can be influenced is that of lifestyle. (Vos & Schoemaker 2006, 23.) It reflects the modern society which is marked by openness and

negotiability of social life, plurality of contexts where actions take place and the consequent variety of choices people in their daily lives are faced with. As defined by Giddens (1991, 81), a lifestyle refers to “a more or less integrated set of practices which an individual embraces”, not only to fulfil practical needs, but also to “give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity”. Consequently, it covers both daily activities as well as constitution of self-identity and includes, for example, habits related to dressing, eating and interacting with others. (Giddens 1991, 5, 80–81.) Thus, it helps a person to express his or her individual identity and the narrative or the life story of the self (Spaargaren & Van Vliet 2000, 7). Thereby, a choice to like or dislike an organization could be made based on how well the organization coheres with one’s identity.

Another process that may influence perception and guide the process of selecting information is that of indirect experience. Indirect experience is based on second-hand knowledge about an object or a person grounded on, for example, public opinion or rumours acquired through communicating with others. It could take place within networks of friends or fellow employees. (Vos & Schoemaker 2006, 24; Vuokko 2004, 200.) Networks, also called grapevine, mediate different kinds of information independent of official communication, or a message an organization would like to convey, and often reach their targets faster than formal communication (Juholin 2006, 160). Indirect experience could be gained also through the mass media the power of which in the current society is said to be on the increase and which shape conversations between people through the public debate (Vos & Schoemaker 2005, 68; Vos & Schoemaker 2006, 24).

Finally, the process of giving meaning to information by placing it in different contexts is referred to as framing. Consequently, events and things are interpreted in a certain light so that more importance is given to some factors and less to others. The situation becomes even more complex when taken into consideration that communication is not a linear process between one sender and one receiver but instead takes place between various actors, senders and receivers who interact and frame the information in distinct ways. (Vos & Schoemaker 2006, 25–26.) Information processing is, thus, prone to distortions and biases which further influence images and perceptions. Therefore, it is often impossible to identify what a person’s knowledge is based on – experiences or associations – as different steps in information processing are difficult to trace back or to introspect on (Vos & Schoemaker 2006, 22). Toskala speaks of a comprehensive experience that is created when emotions, images, previous knowledge, impressions and memories are combined to information processing. Meanings, which are thus created, are implicational, unspoken, and cannot be reduced to the parts that the sum consists of. (Toskala 2002, 155, 157.)

5 METHODOLOGY

The starting point, or a stimulus, for the empirical part of this study was a research conducted by the Communication Research Centre (CRC) of the University of Helsinki for the Ministry of the Environment in the spring 2008 (Turunen & Lavento 2008). Similarly, this study consisted of two phases. In the first phase, stakeholders of the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre were mapped to identify which groups the main stakeholders consisted of (objective no. 1). In the second phase, a selected group of stakeholders was interviewed in order to collect information about their perceptions on the communication and their relationship with the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre as well as to receive suggestions for the future with regard to the new state authority, the Central Finland Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (objective no. 2).

To meet the previously outlined objectives this study had four research questions: 1. Which groups do the stakeholders of the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre consist of?; 2. How do the stakeholders perceive the communication of the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre?; 3. How do the stakeholders perceive their relationship with the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre?; and 4. What suggestions do the stakeholders have for the communication and the relationship in the new state authority? The first research question was covered by the preliminary study, presented as a whole in chapter 5.2, and research questions 2.–4. were covered through the main study the results of which are presented in chapter 6.

The purpose of this study, to better understand communication and relationships between public sector organizations and their stakeholders, will be answered by the theoretical part and reflected on based on the findings of the empirical part in the Conclusions chapter.

The following chapters include a description of the case study approach and the underlying qualitative research tradition. The course of the study is

explained by first describing the preliminary study and then the main study including data collection through eight semi-structured interviews as well as data analysis based on a qualitative content analysis. Finally, a short description on validity and reliability in qualitative research is presented.

5.1 Qualitative Case Study Approach

This study, focused on the stakeholder relations of the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre, is based on a case study approach. According to Lapan and Armfield (2009, 166), a case study is a form of research focusing on “singular contemporary events or topics” in order to produce thorough descriptions about the phenomena studied rich in detail. Moreover, the relevant research tradition underlying this study is qualitative research.

Qualitative research methods are often described in contrast to their quantitative counterparts. What is central, instead, is how well the chosen methodology fits the research problem in question. (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 14.) Qualitative research, being concerned with how “the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced, produced or constituted”, suits well the present study that is interested in perceptions of stakeholders. Moreover, the methods of data gathering are flexible and take into account the social context in which data are produced including complexities and detail involved. (Mason 2002, 3.) As Silverman (2005, 9) describes it, the detail can be found in the precise articulation of matters, such as “people’s understandings and interactions”.

Qualitative research focuses on materials that are often textual in nature (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 15). In the case of the present study, the data consist of interview materials. Some form of quantification is often used but statistical analysis is not considered central (Mason 2002, 3). Moreover, qualitative studies are often based on a small number of cases (Silverman 2005, 9). This is true also for the present study where after the initial mapping of stakeholders a small sample of key stakeholders is selected as informants for the interviews. It is not the quantity that counts but rather the depth of analysis. What is central is the perspective of the people studied. (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 16, 18).

Silverman (2005, 10) refers to the concern for the “individual’s point of view”, or “actor’s perspective”, found in some qualitative research, with emotionalism – it is focused on authentic insights, meanings and emotions. Eskola and Suoranta, on the other hand, speak of the narrative nature of qualitative research. Interviews, for example, can be regarded as stories. From this perspective, qualitative research is like diving into the

multidimensional and multilayered world of narratives and stories. (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 24.)

5.2 Preliminary Study

The first phase, the preliminary research, of this study consisted of identifying stakeholders of the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre. The purpose of it was to answer the first research question, "Which groups do the stakeholders of the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre consist of?" The preliminary study was conducted mainly in January and February 2009 through collecting stakeholder data from various documents of the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre. These documents included address sticker files of the Communication function, collective e-mail lists of the Environment Centre as well as the lists of members of the consultative board of stakeholders of the Environment Centre, and members of stakeholder groups that participated in the preparation of the new provincial environmental programme. The data included stakeholder type, name of the organization, locality when available, position of the contact person and source of the contact information.

All the data were listed and saved in Excel, resulting in some 270 lines. The stakeholder types were based on the communication and data management strategies of the environmental administration and included 11 groups: environmental administration; other state administration; municipalities; political decision makers; non-governmental organizations, foundations and other non-profit associations; business associations; media; citizens, corporations; educational institutes, research institutes and libraries; as well as international stakeholders (Turunen & Lavento 2008, 7–8).

Later on in the spring, the list was sent via e-mail to the managers and some members of the personnel to further complete the list and cover possibly missing stakeholders. Finally, after the corrections and additions the list of stakeholders included 269 stakeholder organizations and contacts specified by name, belonging to ten stakeholder groups, as well as 46 generic instances, such as primary schools in the Central Finland area and certain departments or other generic contacts within organizations. The group of international stakeholders remained without results.

The original purpose of the preliminary research was, in addition to mapping stakeholders as widely as possible, to classify them in a systematic way according to various characteristics. However, as the task turned out wider than expected, classifying stakeholders was limited to the stakeholder type. Therefore, the original goal could be achieved only partially due to limited resources. Finding ways to further classify their stakeholders and

thus systematise their stakeholder base, remains an issue for further studies and development by the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre.

5.3 Data Collection – Qualitative Interviewing

The method chosen for gathering data was the interview. In simplest terms, an interview consists of a situation where a person, an interviewer, makes questions to another person, an interviewee. A more contemporary approach would be to consider interview a discussion initiated and guided by a researcher. (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 86.)

According to Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2001, 35), interview gives the interviewee an active role, considers him or her a subject who is given the freedom to express matters that involve him or her as freely as possible. The ontological position behind a qualitative interview implies that “people’s knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences and interactions are meaningful properties of social reality” (Mason 2002, 63). This applies also for the present study that aims at exploring stakeholders’ perceptions on communication. The underlying epistemological position, on the other hand, suggests that data can be generated through talking interactively with people, asking them questions and listening to them (Mason 2002, 63–64). The method can be called also phenomenological as the interviewees were simply asked to describe their perceptions (Goldstein 1999, 7).

Advantages of the qualitative interview method include, for example, the possibility to clarify answers or to deepen them by asking for explanation or making additional questions. It is useful also in situations when the topic of the study is complex involving many dimensions. Disadvantages, on the other hand, include, for example, the fact that it is time consuming, not only on the level of the actual conduct, searching for good interviewees and agreeing about the time, place and other details, but also with regard to the process of transcribing the material. Moreover, analysing, interpreting and reporting of the data can be challenging, as ready-made models do not exist. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 35.)

Interviews can be divided into structured and unstructured interviews according to the extent to which questions are formulated and binding. At one end of the continuum, there is a structured survey interview with a fixed and ordered set of questions and options for answering, and in the other end an unstructured in-depth interview approaching an open conversation. (Tiittula & Ruusuvuori 2005, 11.) Between structured and unstructured interviews there are semi-structured interviews, also called theme or focused interviews (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 77, 80). A characteristic of semi-structured interviews is that some elements of the interviews are determined prior to

the interviews but not all (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 47). Themes and questions, for example, might be decided in advance, but the order and form of questions could change from one interview to another (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 77). In this study, the data were collected through eight semi-structured interviews.

5.3.1 Interview Structure

The interview structure consisted of four different sections, A–D, including 25 questions related to 14 themes (see appendix). The first section, A, was dedicated to background information while sections B–D were each based on one of the research questions. While sections A–C dealt with the past or present situation before the reform, section D focused mainly on the future including some questions regarding the new state authority. Related to background information, the interviewees were asked about their work experience, their familiarity with the Environment Centre and the frequency of their contact (Luoma-aho 2005) with the Environment Centre. Section B, related to communication, included questions about communication preferences, preferred communication means and forms, information needs and experiences of dealing with the Environment Centre. The purpose of it was to respond to the second research question, “How do the stakeholders perceive the communication of the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre?” These themes and the relevant questions were based on the study of Turunen and Lavento (2008).

Section C focused on relationships and was intended to answer the third research question, “How do the stakeholders perceive their relationship with the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre?” First, the interviewees were asked to describe their relationship with the Environment Centre. Other questions were concerned with mutual control, trust, commitment, satisfaction and the type of relationship. Trust was inquired with four questions related to three sub-themes: integrity, dependability and competence. The questions in this section were based on Grunig’s and Hon’s (1999), and Grunig’s (2002) definitions on the relationship indicators and the related qualitative instrument by Grunig (2002) for assessing relationships, including suggestions for key questions to be asked in qualitative interviews or focus group discussions. Moreover, the interviewees were asked about the purpose of their relationship with the Environment Centre.

Finally, section D, related to changes in communication and relationships, was dedicated to the last research question, “What suggestions do the stakeholders have for the communication and the relationship in the new state authority?” The questions of the last section dealt with changes, communicational differences between the members of the new state authority, relationship in the new state authority as well as suggestions for further development of the communication and the relationship in the new

state authority. The two questions about changes were based on two different sub-themes: dynamism (Ferguson 1984 in Grunig, Grunig & Ehling 1992, 83) and openness (Grunig et al. 1992, 83). The other questions were based on the interests of the Environment Centre to clarify stakeholders' views on the new state authority.

Questions were formulated prior to the interviews with the purpose of being all asked in more or less the same order from all the interviewees. The form of the questions, however, was not strictly obeyed in the actual interview situation, as the purpose was to create a natural, conversation-like situation where the interviewees could feel comfortable to express themselves. So instead, the interviewer used her own words to ask and explain every question in a way that the content of each question, nevertheless, would remain the same for all the informants. Moreover, some additional questions were made in case something the interviewees said was unclear or if some further explanation was needed. In addition, the participants were allowed to express themselves rather freely and were not interrupted even if the answers in some cases would meander quite a lot. In this way, it was ensured that all possible perspectives on each topic could come up. As a result, however, the material became somewhat large including also some less relevant data that required a lot of reading in the analysis part.

5.3.2 Interviewees

The interviewees, who were altogether eight, were selected among the groups of main stakeholders of the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre. The end product of the preliminary study, the list of the main stakeholders of the Environment Centre, was presented in a meeting with the supervising team of this thesis in the Environment Centre at the end of May 2009. The two members of the team, the communication officer and a senior researcher of the Environment Centre, gave suggestions on possible informants. In addition, the managers and other relevant staff from the different units of the Environment Centre were asked some additional suggestions for possible participants from two groups of stakeholders that had not been covered in the supervising meeting. Among the suggested interviewees the author selected eight whom to contact. The identity of the final group of interviewees, thus, remained known only by the interviewer to guarantee anonymity for the participants. The process of selecting a limited number of interviewees is referred to as purposive sampling (Silverman 2005, 129).

The criteria for selecting the interviewees were three-fold. First, the interviewees were selected with the purpose of covering the main stakeholder groups as specified in the preliminary study. As two groups were excluded, the main stakeholders chosen for the study covered eight

groups: 1) media; 2) companies; 3) other state administration; 4) business associations; 5) educational institutions, research institutes and libraries; 6) non-governmental organizations, foundations and other non-profit associations; 7) municipalities and 8) political decision makers. The two stakeholder groups that were excluded from the interviews included environmental administration and citizens as done also in the study of Turunen and Lavento (2008). There were two reasons for this: first, including the environmental administration in the study would have required two separate studies as the internal stakeholders cannot be inquired the same things as the external stakeholders and, second, inquiring the opinions of citizens would have required a much larger sample than what was possible within the scope of this study (Turunen & Lavento 2008, 14).

Another criterion for selecting the interviewees was relevance: selected organizations were expected to be relevant partners of the Environment Centre. In addition, as one of the questions in section D dealt with the perceived communicational differences between the three main partners of the new state authority, Central Finland Regional Environment Centre, Central Finland Road Region and the Employment and Economic Development Centre for Central Finland, the selected interviewees were expected to be partners also with the latter two organizations. This last criterion, however, turned out more difficult to fulfil due to the limited resources and time that were available from the side of the Environment Centre for suggesting possible interviewees for the study. Another reason might have been that as the cooperation between the partners of the new state authority was still in its infancy, determining common stakeholders was difficult. Finally, the interviewees were chosen bearing in mind also the pragmatic side of the actual conduct of the interviews, namely geographical distances. As this was not considered contradictory for the fulfilment of the other principle criteria, the interviewees were selected among those stakeholder organizations that had an office in the Central Finland area.

5.3.3 The Interviews

The interviews were conducted 9.–17.6.2009. Prior to this, a test interview was made in the first week of June to see how much time one interview would approximately take and to test the interview structure, which was consequently moderately adjusted. The candidates selected as possible informants for the actual interviews were contacted by phone in the last week of May and the first week of June. The responses for participating in the study were mainly positive followed by an agreement on the time and place for the interview, either immediately on the phone, as it happened in most cases, or later on by e-mail. In one case, where the person contacted was temporarily out of her normal work in the Central Finland area, the response was negative. Moreover, in another case, the person contacted suggested

another person from the same organization. The interviewees could choose the place for the interview themselves providing that the place would be peaceful and quiet with sufficient privacy. After the initial phone contact, the interviewees were sent an e-mail confirmation on their participation in the study, the agreed appointment for the interview and the contact information of the interviewer. Moreover, a couple of days before the interview they were sent a reminder e-mail with an outline of the main topics of the interviews.

In six cases the interviews took place in the premises of the organizations concerned, either in the interviewee's own office or in a meeting room reserved for the interview, and in two cases in the premises of a third organization where the interviewees in question had another meeting on the same day. Six interviews were conducted in Jyväskylä and two outside Jyväskylä. The duration of the interviews ranged between 42 minutes and one hour and 42 minutes. All the interviews were recorded to ensure an exact documentation of the content of the interviews and to allow the interviewer to concentrate on the interaction in the interview situation. Some notes were taken on the main points of the answers.

5.4 Data Analysis – Qualitative Content Analysis

The purpose of analyzing qualitative data is to clarify and organize the data in order to produce new information about the studied phenomenon. The aim is to compress the data without losing any relevant information and to increase their informational value by bringing clarity and sense into the otherwise fragmented and diffuse data. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, 137.) The method for creating a compact and general description of the phenomenon under study can be referred to also as content analysis (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 105).

Several authors describe the steps that the process of qualitative analysis involves. To begin with it is important to familiarize oneself with the data thoroughly, to make sense of the data as a whole, and to choose the unit of analysis (Elo & Kyngäs 2007, 109). Frey, Botan, Friedman and Kreps (1992, 196) call this process of identifying the unit of analysis, elements that are to be studied, unitizing. The unit of analysis can be, for example, a syntactical unit, related to single symbols, such as words or metaphors, a referential unit, what a text or a sentence is about, or a thematic unit, related to specific topics (Frey et al. 1992, 196 citing Krippendorff 1980).

The common thread in the analysis is formed by the research problem and the relevant research questions. Consequently, one step in the analysis process is to determine, which parts of the data are actually relevant for the research concern in question. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 94.) Moreover, the

data need to be organized. In the case of data that are collected with semi-structured interviews, a good way to do this is by organizing the data according to the interview themes. This process of organizing the data can also be called coding. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, 150, 151.)

There are two principle ways for coding the data: one, to look at the data without theoretical presumptions and, two, to make use of a theory or a theoretical perspective (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, 151). These can be referred to as inductive and deductive approaches (Elo & Kyngäs 2007, 109). To use an interview theme structure to codify the data would indicate a deductive approach as themes in semi-structured interviews are often based on some previous theoretical knowledge (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, 152). However, these two approaches can also be combined as Elo and Kyngäs explain. If the analysis matrix for coding the data is not strictly structured, after gathering the data by content, they can be analyzed following the principles of an inductive content analysis grouping, categorizing and making abstractions. The end product of the analysis is often categories or concepts that describe the phenomenon. (Elo & Kyngäs 2007, 108, 110–111.) One such way to categorize perception- or experience-related data is to divide them into categories positive, negative, neutral and mixed (Luoma-aho 2005, 242).

In this study, all the collected data, consisting of approximately 10 hours and 15 minutes of audio material, were transcribed. This was done mainly in August 2009. The transcription was done word-for-word. Words or parts of the sentences that were unclear were marked with brackets. In addition, some non-verbal signals, such as pauses, laughter and sighs, were marked down whenever they felt significant as supporting information for the verbal content. Lengths of the pauses, on the other hand, were not considered. Nevertheless, in the final data analysis only the manifest content was analyzed (Elo & Kyngäs 2007, 109). In a transcribed form, the data made up about 150 pages of material.

Once transcribed, all the material was printed out and read through. The purpose of the first reading round was to create an overall idea of the data in their entirety. In the second step, all the data were filtered according to the interview themes, which constituted the unit of analysis. This was in accordance with the principles of a deductive content analysis, as explained earlier, since the themes were based on existing theoretical perspectives. In doing so, all the relevant parts of the text were gathered under the interview themes interview by interview so that each interview was rearranged according to the themes. Parts of the data, which were considered irrelevant with regard to the research questions, were left out. As a result, each theme would include answers or parts of answers from different questions. Parts of the data that did not fit into any of the themes but were still considered

relevant, were collected together in a category "Other" for further examination.

Once all the relevant parts of the interview material were filtered according to the themes, interview by interview, the material was again printed out and read through. As a result, some parts that seemed irrelevant were further eliminated as well as some were moved from one theme to another. Next, the answers to each theme from different interviews were brought together so that a new file was created for each theme. Each answer or extract included a letter and a number indicating the respondent and the number of the question the answer was given to. The purpose of this phase was to bring all the relevant answers together to create an overview of answers each theme consisted of. During this phase, some parts of the texts were still moved from a theme to another or excluded from further analysis for being irrelevant to the research questions. The principle in placing an answer or part of an answer under a certain theme was that one extract of a text could be placed under one theme only. In cases that one extract seemed to fit more than one theme at a time, a priority was given to the theme that the question had dealt with in the first place.

The next step in processing the data for the final analysis involved summarizing the data under each theme. This process can be referred to also as reducing the data (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 111). The summaries were done in a way that the terms and words the interviewees had used were preserved as far as possible. In addition, the original text was kept record of, so that in case some unclear points would emerge later on, the original part of the answer could be easily traced back. While summarizing the answers, sentences that seemed illustrative as possible citations for the reporting of the findings were further underlined. Once the summaries were ready, they were brought together in a new file, printed out and read through again. At this point similarities and differences were marked down for the actual analysis – grouping, categorizing and further arranging the themes that the final step consisted of, according to the principles of an inductive content analysis. One categorization widely used was to divide the data into categories positive, negative, neutral and mixed (Luoma-aho 2005, 242).

5.5 Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Research

Quality or trustworthiness of research is often explained in terms of validity and reliability. Traditionally, validity refers to studying what has been intended and reliability to the repeatability of the study. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 133.) These concepts were first used in the sphere of quantitative research and are based on an assumption that there is an objective reality and an objective truth that can be attained by the researcher. For this reason, they

have been criticized for not fully meeting the needs of qualitative research. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 133; Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 185.)

As Hirsjärvi and Hurme point out, abandoning the conventional forms of reliability and validity does not mean qualitative research can be done in whatever way. The researcher should in any case aim at revealing the perceptions and the world of whom he or she is studying as well as possible. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 188–189.) Consequently, the role of the researcher in qualitative research is significant. Indeed, Eskola and Suoranta (2008, 210) suggest that the criterion for the trustworthiness in qualitative research is the researcher himself and, as a consequence, the whole research process involved, admitting one's own subjectivity in an open manner being a basic principle. Thus, as Hurme and Hirsjärvi (2001, 189) propose, structural validity is central in qualitative research – explaining all the phases of the research process and the choices that were made – including purpose of the study, data collection, selection of informants, data analysis and possible personal biases (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 137–138).

With regard to content analysis, validity can be evaluated, for example, in terms of content categories and how well they are constructed (Frey et al. 1992, 197). Silverman (2005, 212–215, 219–220), on the other hand, describes ways for thinking critically to enhance validity of findings: refuting any easy conclusions or assumed relations, constant comparison between different parts of the data, comprehensive data treatment, considering also anomalies and deviant cases as well as using tabulations and quantitative measures when appropriate.

Reliability in qualitative research, on the contrary, deals more with the quality of the data and their analysis – for example, whether all the relevant data have been considered and whether the results reflect the thinking of the interviewees. Transcription, on one hand, can enhance the quality of the interview material. With regard to data collection, careful planning of interview structure and recording of interviews can contribute to the quality. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 185, 189.) Related to content analysis, reliability can be assessed, for example, in the quality of the coding process (Frey et al. 1992, 198).

The evaluation of this study is included in the final chapter 7, Conclusions.

6 RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of this study. While the background information of the interviewees is described in chapter 6.1., chapters 6.2–6.4 are each based on one of the research questions. Chapter 6.2 seeks to answer the second research question, “How do the stakeholders perceive the communication of the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre?” Chapter 6.3 includes answers to the third research question “How do the stakeholders perceive their relationship with the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre?” Finally, chapter 6.4 is focused on the last research question “What suggestions do the stakeholders have for the communication and the relationship in the new state authority?” The results of the preliminary study focused on the first research question, “Which groups do the stakeholders of the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre consist of?”, were presented in chapter 5.2.

6.1 Background Information

The interviewees held various positions in their respective organizations including environmental manager, regional manager, development manager, manager of an editorial office, executive manager, mayor, secretary and chairperson of a local council. Five of the participants (P) were men and three were women. The interviewees belonged to eight groups of stakeholders:

media (P1); companies (P2); other state administration (P3); business associations (P4); educational institutions, research institutes and libraries (P5); non-governmental organizations, foundations and other non-profit associations (P6); municipalities (P7) and political decision makers (P8).

First, the interviewees were asked how long they had worked in their respective organizations. Half of the participants, i.e. four, had worked there

less than ten years (1,5 years; 1,75 years; 4 years; 8 years) in their organization. Two had worked there between 20 and 30 years (24 years; 28 years), one 16 years and one over 30 years (36 years).

Next, the interviewees were asked how familiar they were with the case organization, Central Finland Regional Environment Centre, i.e., how many years of cooperation they had with the Environment Centre. Considering the establishment of the regional environment centres in 1995, the maximum length of cooperation taken into account was 14 years although some of the participants had been in contact with the same people during the preceding environmental authorities as well. Half of the interviewees had from three to six years of experience of cooperation with the Environment Centre, three had 14 years of experience and one had less than one year of experience.

Third, the participants were inquired how often in general they were in contact with the Environment Centre. Half of the interviewees were in contact with the Environment Centre on an annual basis: three used to deal with the Environment Centre from one to two times a year and one interviewee a few times a year. Three interviewees had a monthly contact with the Environment Centre: two were in contact every second month and one interviewee once a month. Finally, one interviewee had a weekly contact with the Environment Centre.

Table 2 presents an overview of the background information related to how long the interviewees had worked in their organization, how many years of cooperation they had had with the Environment Centre and how frequently they were in contact with the Environment Centre. The number of mentions by interviewees can be found in parentheses.

TABLE 2 Background Information

	Years of Work Experience	Years of Cooperation	Frequency of Contact
1.	under 10 (4)	3–6 (4)	annual (4)
2.	20–30 (2)	14 (3)	monthly (3)
3.	10–19 (1) / over 30 (1)	under 1 (1)	weekly (1)

6.2 Communication

This chapter presents results relevant for answering the second research question: “How do the stakeholders perceive the communication of the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre?” It is composed of four chapters related to communication preferences, communication means and forms, information needs and experiences in dealing with the Environment Centre.

6.2.1 Communication Preferences

To find out about their communication preferences the interviewees were asked what they appreciated or valued about the communication of organizations in general. The answers were divided into three groups according to how often they were mentioned. In addition, there were some single mentions presented by the interviewees. Moreover, a few critical comments dealt with how these communication preferences were actualized in the relationship with the respective organizations and the Environment Centre. Next, these findings are presented more closely.

6.2.1.1 Most Mentioned Topics

The most mentioned topics were 1) openness and 2) up-to-date communication, which four of the respondents cited.

Openness was described, for example, in terms of information acquisition and access to documents. Being able to speak also about problematic issues was considered part of interaction. Another interviewee referred to openness in terms of being proactive in communicating – not only when somebody asks.

"tietysti tämmösessä viestinnällisessä mielessä, ni se avoimuus on myös hyvin hyödyllinen että, että ei, ei ikään kuin käperrytä sitte tälläseen viraston malliseksi, että lausutaan, kun kysytään" (from the perspective of communication, also openness is useful – in a way that you don't nestle yourself in a form of a bureau and answer only when you are asked) (P8)

Up-to-date or real time communication was described by one of the interviewees as timeliness and liveliness of information in terms of updating web pages regularly. Another participant mentioned communicating about matters that were topical for the sector in question.

6.2.1.2 Second Most Mentioned Topics

The second most mentioned communication preferences included 1) knowing people, 2) interactivity, 3) targeting of communication and 4) proper quantity of communication, cited by three interviewees each.

Knowing people was described as a way to get to the right source of information more easily. Moreover, it was considered important to have a contact person with whom to go through more detailed matters that required conversation. Interactivity, on the other hand, was described, for example, in terms of collecting feedback. In addition, if web pages were changed, updated or renewed, sending an e-mail about it was considered important.

Without interactivity communication was perceived as one-sided, like setting the table for nobody to eat. In personal communication, interactivity was considered in contrast to information-meeting-like-situations where a communicator stood in front and spoke while the audience listened.

"henkilökohtasessa viestinnässä [...], et se niinku pitäs olla sitte sellasta aika vuorovaikutteista, se viestintä, että se, et et semmoset tiedotustilaisuusluonteiset, joissa viestijä on siellä pöydän takana ja sali ihmisiä ja viestitään, ni se ei, se ei välttämättä ehkä oo sitte paras tapa viestiä kuitenkaa." (in personal communication [...], it should be quite interactive, the communication, type informative meetings where the communicator stands behind the table, there is a room full of people and you communicate, it is not necessary the best way to communicate.) (P3)

In addition, communication was considered a two-way process, something that was done together in a win-win way, both by giving and by receiving. In consequence, the communicator was not regarded as the only one responsible, but also the role of the other party in being active, for example, in searching for information on the Internet, instead of waiting for the message to come to him or to her directly, was underlined.

Targeting of communication was described in terms of planning communication in a way that the message reached whom it was directed to. Moreover, it was considered important that the content of the communication was formulated according to the target group. One of the interviewees referred to marketing communication and segmentation in a sense that different stakeholders should be communicated to in different ways. Being familiar with the sector or the industry of the stakeholders, in order to understand them better, was considered valuable by one interviewee. Considering the needs of the "field" was seen important also for making the stakeholders committed to the cause of communication.

Proper quantity of communication included two opposite perspectives. Two interviewees were stressing the importance of not communicating too much as excessive or unnecessary communication was considered unlikely to reach anyone. In addition, the importance of prioritizing messages instead of "communicating for the sake of communication" was underlined. Finding the right amount was related to the right targeting of communication.

In contrast, another interviewee felt that communication was never too much and could even come through various channels as e-mail messages today were easy to delete. According to this respondent, it was more annoying if a message came only once and too late.

6.2.1.3 Third Most Mentioned Topics

Next, there were communication preferences that were mentioned by two of the interviewees including 1) direct communication, 2) honesty, 3) trustworthiness, 4) comprehensibility, 5) proactivity, 6) objectivity and 7) accessibility to information.

Direct communication was preferred over indirect communication through for example media or Internet. Honesty was also valued and described in terms of creating a truthful image through communication although it was considered natural, and one goal of communication too, to communicate about issues that were beneficial for the organization. Related to honesty was trustworthiness, mentioned also by two interviewees. Telling also about negative issues, such as failure, made communication trustworthy. Comprehensibility was related to the content of the communication and formulating the messages in a way that the recipients could understand them. In the case of communicating about agriculture, for example, even an ordinary farmer should be able to understand the message.

Proactivity was described by the interviewees, for example, with regard to informing about an event well in advance or proposing cooperation for organizing events together. According to one interviewee, it was in line with the values of sustainable development, and a good example of proactive pursuit, to organize events together instead of merely inviting others to participate in one's own events.

Proactivity was a topic very much underlined by one of the interviewees. It was described as giving guidance and steering in advance instead of evaluating only results.

"vasta jälkikäteen arvioidaan ja sitten katsotaan, että mikä on lopputulos, että onko se mennyt niinku nuottien mukaan vai ei, must se on huono järjestelmä, vaan niin viestinnässä kun myöskin työskentelytavoissa niin tällasen viranomais, viranomaisen tuli t-toimia niinku ennakoidusti. Ja se on ehkä se semmonen selkein viesti mitä mitä, mitä tuota toivosi." (only after you evaluate and see what the result is, if it has gone according to the notes or not, according to me it is a bad system, but instead, in communication as well as other working methods, a public official should act proactively. And that is maybe the clearest message one would hope.) (P8)

Moreover, it was considered that information related to the sphere of authority of the Environment Centre should be made available in a proactive way. This was regarded as making it easier to coordinate, collect and disseminate information, such as results of studies, from the stakeholder organization over to its members. Although with regard to communication preferences proactivity was cited by two interviewees only, related to other themes it appeared as relevant too.

Objectivity of information was described, for example, as a neutral position in offering information. As an example was mentioned the waterway of Saarijärvi and how communication about it should cover different perspectives, not only environmental protection but also, for example, the environmental impact assessment of industrial activity. Another interviewee mentioned “political drivers” that should not govern the environmental administration. Finally, in terms of accessibility to information, finding the information on the web pages easily and fast was considered important.

6.2.1.4 Single Preferences

Finally, there were some communication preferences that were mentioned by single interviewees, such as 1) regularity, 2) predictability, 3) informal communication, 4) usability of information, 5) visibility in the media and 6) fast communication.

For example, one interviewee referred to informal communication in explaining how communication should be not only about events or official matters but also about asking “how are you, how is it going”. The representative of the media for whom by the nature of his work timing was important, on the other hand, mentioned fast communication.

6.2.1.5 Critical Comments

Related to accessibility of information, one interviewee felt information could not be accessed as easily as it should be, considering the responsibility of public officials for granting easy usability of information. In addition, this interviewee hoped for more direct communication from the side of the Environment Centre over to its customers, for example, about results of big projects and related materials. Being “a loyal customer”, the interviewee also hoped to have a contact person for additional information.

Another interviewee felt that proactivity did not currently actualize sufficiently. Often matters were evaluated reactively afterwards, for example, related to issues and cases that the Environment Centre dealt with municipalities. Moreover, with regard to openness, talking through problematic issues was still somewhat missing, according to one interviewee, in the relationship between the organization in question and the Environment Centre. Related to this was the comment of another interviewee who felt that sometimes, especially in matters that were more sensitive, there was an unwillingness to provide information from the side of the Environment Centre.

6.2.2 Communication Means and Forms

The communication means and forms through which the interviewees preferred to keep in contact with the Environment Centre were divided into two groups: direct and indirect communication means and forms (e.g. Juholin 2006). The groups were more or less equal in terms of relevance and size. In the group of direct communication means and forms, the four most cited received some more mentions than the four most relevant indirect means and forms. In the group of indirect communication means and forms, however, there were more single mentions for specific communication means and forms. In addition, the interviewees presented some critical comments by giving feedback on some of the existing communication means and forms. Next, these findings are presented more closely.

6.2.2.1 Direct Communication Means and Forms

Direct communication means and forms cited by the interviewees included: 1) personal contacts and meetings, 2) telephone, 3) small group meetings, 4) training, 5) big informative meetings and 6) media contacts.

Among the most cited direct communication means and forms were personal contacts and meetings, mentioned by all but one interviewee. One interviewee, for example, described how it was good to have somebody to talk with and to go through things. Another referred to interaction that made meetings the most important communication form, especially in matters that were more complex and required interpretation.

"Kyllä minusta ehdottomasti paras on tapaaminen, siis sitä ei korvaa koskaan mikään, mikään tuota sähköinen viestintä, [...] sen lisäksi että, että joku monitahosempi asia, ku käsitellään ni, semmonen vuorovaikutus siitä, että miten, miten olisi hyvä toimia, ni on hyödyllisin, ja sen takia pidän sitä niinku aina tärkeimpänä vaihtoehtona, tai niinku ykkösjällä sitä." (According to me, the absolutely best is a meeting which cannot be replaced by any electronic communication, [...] in addition to when there is a more complex issue that is dealt with, interaction about how it would be good to act is most beneficial, and therefore I always consider it the most important or number one alternative.) (P8)

One interviewee referred to customer thinking mentioning there should be "a loyal customer manager" who would thoroughly know the matters of the organization in question. In addition, the interviewee was hoping that the reform would not change the contact person, or that at least there should be a continuum in terms of introducing the new person into the industry and the organization in question.

Next, five interviewees mentioned telephone as a preferred means of keeping contact with the Environment Centre. It was considered useful when some

details needed to be checked or when dealing with clearly defined matters. In addition, one interviewee stressed the importance of so-called telephone help or service line. In comparison to e-mails, an advantage it had was direct and real time help when, for example, Internet was not available. Moreover, it could ease the work of public officials who did not always have time to answer the phone.

"Sähkönen viestintä on tullu ihan, ihan jäädäkseen, mutta tuota niin ni, sit mun mielestä on hirveen hyvä, että on, on puhelinpalvelu, e-että... joissaki asioissa e... sun on helpompi niinkun tulla puolitiehen, tavallaan neuvotella taikka tehdä kompromissi taikka kysyä apua."
(*Electronic communication has come to stay, but in my opinion it would be very good to have telephone service too... in some matters it is easier to come half way, in a way negotiate, or make a compromise, or ask for help.*) (P6)

The category of small group meetings, consisting of answers from four interviewees, included, for example, meetings, small conferences, steering group meetings, negotiations and development discussions. One interviewee mentioned workshops as an example of interactive meetings that could substitute big informative meetings or briefings, which, according to him, lacked interaction. They could be lead by an outside leader or a chairperson to guarantee neutrality and interaction.

"semmosia työpajatyypisiä, jossa tuota sitte on, on jopa, on niinku sitte ulkopuolinen vetäjä ja puheenjohtaja niissä että, et me ei niinku ite, siinä niinku haetaan vähän semmosta neutraaliisuutta niihi asioihi, että ei, ei olla niinku ite siinä niinku päämääröimässä sitä juttuu" (kind of workshops which can even have an outside leader and a chairperson, the purpose is to strive for neutrality in the things so that we are not lording it over ourselves) (P3)

Two interviewees mentioned training from the side of the Environment Centre. One perspective included training members of non-governmental organizations to increase local know-how on environmental matters. Another suggestion regarded training elected officials, chairpersons or even members of committees in municipalities about the field of activities of the Environment Centre. This could be organized annually or when a new municipal council was formed.

Direct communication means and forms that were mentioned by a single interviewee included big informative meetings once or twice a year and media contacts. With regard to media contacts, the representative of the media suggested the Environment Centre could represent itself to the journalists, for example, by visiting a meeting of a journalist association. According to the interviewee, the Environment Centre could be more active in creating personal contacts with the media.

6.2.2.2 Indirect Communication Means and Forms

Indirect communication means and forms, mentioned by the interviewees covered: 1) e-mail, 2) Internet, 3) electronic newsletter, 4) new Internet-based technology, 5) electronic materials, 6) printed materials, 7) customer magazine, 8) introductory materials, 9) traditional letters and 10) communication through mass media.

Among the indirect communication means and forms, electronic communication was clearly most preferred. Six interviewees mentioned e-mail. According to them, e-mail was good for communicating about current issues, sending attachments and other files in an electronic format, and taking care of day-to-day, routine matters. Internet, referring to web pages, mentioned by three, was regarded as a good tool for communicating about current topics as well as storing and accessing materials and documents. In addition, it was considered useful for finding out background information and checking details. As a primary source of information, however, it did not work, according to one interviewee, since, firstly, information was easily lost and, secondly, one needed a reason or an impulse to go to and look for something on the Internet.

An electronic newsletter was another means of electronic communication that was mentioned by three interviewees. One interviewee suggested an e-mail list through which one could get information about current issues, recent events, research and studies. A link in the e-mail would lead to a relevant web page. According to the representative of the media, electronic press releases worked well. Another interviewee proposed a newsletter or a PDF-file instead of a printed magazine. Moreover, it should be well targeted in terms of both content and recipients due to an overflow of information that required a continuous process of sifting out unimportant information. According to this interviewee, printed organizational magazines were useless. First, Internet was much faster in terms of finding information and, second, there was no time to read customer magazines that were many in numbers.

"jos niinku ajattelee niinku tämähetkistä tilannetta, ni kyllä tämmösen julkisella toimijalla, ni omat lehdet ja tollanen niinku vaikka ympäristökeskuksella niinku oma lehti, ni tuntus aika, aika hukkaaheitetyltä" (if you think of the current situation, own magazines for a public actor, such as the Environment Centre, seem quite useless) (P3)

Two participants, on the other hand, mentioned new, Internet-based technology. One referred to tools, such as Facebook, which, according to him, were no longer far out for organizational communication. They enabled, among other things, discussion and interaction for which e-mail was clumsy and outmoded. Another interviewee suggested constructing an open space where research materials could be collected.

Indirect communication means and forms that were cited by one interviewee included electronic materials, such as files and attachments, which were considered better than printed materials as they could be easily distributed forwards. The same interviewee also commented that extranet was not needed, but, instead, it was sufficient that materials came to her directly. Another interviewee, on the contrary, felt that printed materials were most useful for getting a message through today. This interviewee believed, in contrast to other interviewees, also in the value of a traditional printed customer magazine instead of an electronic newsletter since e-mail, according to him, was overloaded with material.

"sähköpostiin tulee nii hirveesti kamaa, että... ja sitten postiin tulee harvakseltaan ja ne harvat, mitä sinne tulee, firmojen lehtiä ja ynnämuuta, ni kyllä ne nyt tulee ainaki selailtua läpitte että." (in the e-mail there is so much stuff that... and by post there is only few and those few that come, magazines of companies and so on, you at least flip through.) (P5)

One was hoping for introductory material about research and studies that the Environment Centre had conducted, for example, during the past ten years. In the perspective of this interviewee, the Environment Centre lacked a channel for accessing information about their research and studies. According to one interviewee, traditional letters were still useful too. Finally, one interviewee gave emphasis on communication through mass media. According to this interviewee, the profile of the Environment Centre should be public and open. Getting information should not depend only on the activity of the people themselves. Interesting topics could be, for example, results of studies, ongoing programs and projects – the everyday work of the Environment Centre as well as explaining the reasons why things were done.

"ympäristöasiat kiinnostaa ihmisiä, ihmiset halua lukee niitä... ja ja sitten, helposti sanomalehdistä, jos omaehtosesti niitä juttuja hakee, ni ne kirjottaa vaa ympäristörikoksista, mutta ei siitä niinkun, siitä arkisesta työstä mitä, mitä suunnitelmia ja, ja ohjelmia tehdään, miten paljon ympäristökeskus tekee semmosta muutakin työtä kun sitä viranomais-ss niinkun vallankäyttöä" (environmental matters interest people, people want to read about them... and, and then, easily the press if they make stories by themselves, they write only about environmental crimes but not about the everyday work – what plans and programs are conducted, how much the Environment Centre does that kind of work other than official exercise of power) (P6)

Moreover, the interviewee suggested series of articles in a newspaper, based on the expertise of the Environment Centre, on current topics, such as the waterway of Saarijärvi and the different dimensions and issues involved.

6.2.2.3 Critical Comments

One interviewee gave strong critical feedback about the VAHTI system, a database used in the environmental administration. According to this

interviewee, it was “technically deficient and difficult to use” and “visually extremely bad” – in need of urgent updating to this millennium.

Big informative meetings, such as the annual stakeholder meeting, got also some critical feedback. One interviewee felt this type of meetings lacked in interactivity. If the content of the meeting could be read also on the Internet while the meeting itself did not offer any new information or added value, participation was considered “a waste of time”. In addition, the same interviewee stressed the importance of planning the content of this type of meetings, which were targeted to different stakeholder groups, carefully to meet the information needs of as many participants as possible. A choice between a big vs. a small, better-targeted informative meeting required critical reflection. Moreover, the communication of the Environment Centre in general was criticized for too much leader-centeredness. This could be seen also in big informative meetings, resulting in one-way communication and an absence of discussions. Targeting and finding new forms for communication was recommended by this interviewee.

One interviewee, furthermore, hoped for chances to participate when issues and cases were being prepared. In this respect, the interviewee missed some activeness and initiatives for discussions and meetings from the side of the Environment Centre. Finally, two interviewees mentioned they did not know who the communications officer of the Environment Centre was.

6.2.3 Information Needs

The most common information needs the interviewees had were related to 1) land use and building, 2) nature conservation, 3) research and development and 4) legislation, mentioned by three participants each.

Information needs related to land use and building included construction, building permits, soil permits, land use, land use planning and use of soil resources. Nature conservation was mentioned with regard to Natura 2000, water protection, maintaining biodiversity, and the long-term goals of the management of the privately owned protected areas with reference to systematic information on how the Environment Centre perceived the situation after three to four years, how things were going to be dealt with and which the plans were.

Research and development, on the other hand, included information needs about research and inquiries, measuring methods, information on the state of the environment at the local level and the expert services of the Environment Centre for different projects. In the perspective of one interviewee, there was very little information available on the research projects and results of the studies the Environment Centre had conducted or was involved with. In

addition, the interviewee felt there was no clarity about how research activities were coordinated and divided among the various environment centres and if there were some contact persons for asking information about research and studies. More systematic cooperation between different environment centres was suggested to guarantee efficient use of resources.

"ympäristökeskuksen tai keskusten tuottamasta tiedosta ja ja niistä mitä siellä tehdään, niistä on niinku ni-in vähän tietoo että, että niitä ei kyllä osaa kukaan hakea [...], kuka on ni spesialisoitunu mihinkin, ja että minkälaisia tietoja, minkälainen budjetti, kuka tekee, miten niitä raportteja tulee, miten niitä saa käyttöön, eli se häviää ihan niinku sinne hallinnon tuntemattomuuteen." (the information produced by the Environment Centre, or the environment centres, and what they do there, is so little that no one can surely find [...], who is specialized in what, what kind of data, what kind of budget, who does, how the reports come out, how they can be accessed, all that disappears in the obscurity of the administration.) (P2)

Information needs about legislation included environmental legislation in general, its growth and how it could be applied. Another interviewee mentioned legal matters under preparation, such as the decree for the wastewater management of the sparsely populated areas, and changes in the legislation, which, according to the interviewee, could be communicated more about. In addition, one referred to the need for legal counselling in the case of judicial problems that sometimes rose in municipalities.

Next, some information needs were mentioned by two interviewees: 1) environmental permits, 2) assessment of environmental impact and 3) business and environment. Topics related to business and the environment included economic life, commerce and environmental matters that had common interests with developing of the industrial and commercial activity. In addition, two interviewees pointed out that information needs varied according to the different departments of the organizations in question and were thus difficult to define.

Finally, information needs mentioned by one of the interviewees covered 1) funding possibilities granted by the Environment Centre, 2) countryside living, 3) development of rural areas, 4) ALKU-project and 5) everyday topics. The Reform Project for Regional State Administration (ALKU) was mentioned by one interviewee with regard to a need to get information about the organization of the new authorities, ELY and AVI, and how in practice it would be carried out including division of duties. One interviewee stressed the importance of communicating about everyday topics, such as when and where going ashore should be avoided during the nesting periods of birds.

"Tää tulee tää turvekysymys siellä Saarijärvellä, kun ihmiset ei voi enää uida eikä pitää verkkoja – vedet on niin likaset jo. Niin... ih., ihan sieltä, että minkä kokoset on ihmisen arje asiat, ni sen kokoset ne tiedotteetkin." (The issue about peat in Saarijärvi comes up when people can no longer swim nor keep fishing nets – waters are so dirty already. So, from there,

what is the size of the everyday topics people deal with, that should be the size of communication too.) (P6)

6.2.4 Experiences in Dealing with the Environment Centre

The different experiences the interviewees had of dealing with the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre were analyzed on a scale positive–neutral–negative. In addition, the overall experience of each interviewee was estimated – whether it was more positive, negative, neutral or mixed. The answers were distributed as follows. Half of the interviewees, i.e. four, had mixed experiences in dealing with the Environment Centre including one interviewee whose experiences were both positive and negative, one who had mixed experiences that were more positive and two who had mixed experiences that were more negative. Two interviewees had only positive experiences and equally two more or less neutral experiences. None of the interviewees had only negative experiences. The table 3 represents the overall distribution of experiences among the eight interviewees.

TABLE 3 Experiences in Dealing with the Environment Centre

	Experiences
1.	mixed (4)
2.	neutral (2) / positive (2)

Positive examples were more numerous, cited by all the interviewees, while negative examples were concentrated in the answers of four participants. Clearly neutral statements were only a couple including one interviewee describing the relations their organization had as neutral, one interviewee commenting “nothing special in the mind”, and a third interviewee mentioning it would depend on the end product of a project this interviewee was involved in. Next, the positive and negative examples of experiences that the interviewees had had while dealing with the Environment Centre are described.

6.2.4.1 Positive Experiences

Positive experiences the interviewees recalled were related to the following topics: 1) partnership, 2) communication and interaction, 3) trust, 4) relations between people, 5) subject matters, 6) expertise and 7) forbearance and patience.

Positive experiences that were most commonly mentioned were related to partnership, cited by four interviewees. In this category the interviewees described, for example, how it was flexible and good to work together, and that the cooperation worked in any case, and that despite some difficulties

“things moved ahead”. The second most mentioned category of positive experiences was communication and interaction, cited by three interviewees. These assessments were related to, for example, communicating and keeping one another informed, getting quick answers, open and good conversation, listening of opinions and feeling at ease to ask for help when needed.

Next, there was trust that formed the basis for positive experiences of two interviewees. Trust was described as “trust and good team spirit” and “confidential relations”. Relations between people, equally quoted by two interviewees, included perspectives on how it was possible to get along with everyone and how people who used to deal with each other were often “good acquaintances” with one another. Two of the interviewees mentioned a subject matter that they had good experiences of. Good feedback was given to lawyers of the Environment Centre as well as the preparation of the water management program (vesienhoitosuunnitelman valmistelu).

Single mentions of positive experiences included “expert work” as well as forbearance and patience towards the inhabitants of municipalities.

6.2.4.2 Negative Experiences

Negative experiences that the interviewees had had covered the following: 1) communication and interaction, 2) partnership, 3) procedures and actions, 4) differences in values and attitudes, 5) indirect experiences and 6) people.

Negative experiences that were most often cited concerned communication and interaction, mentioned by four interviewees. One interviewee referred to negative publicity that some conflict issues had created for the Environment Centre. Related to this, he felt the Environment Centre had failed in the communication of certain nature conservation projects, such as the water protection program and Natura 2000. One of the interviewees had bad experiences about the communication of the top management related to some comments, which according to him were not appropriate and fair, presented publicly. One interviewee mentioned “not very good arguments” that had marked his previous experiences of the Environment Centre. In addition, two interviewees referred to a negative image or feeling about the Environment Centre among some stakeholders: dissatisfaction among the members of the organization in question, and according to another interviewee, opposition and resentment related to the previously mentioned nature conservation projects among the citizens.

One of the interviewees, whose overall experience was mixed with a more negative tone, was particularly disappointed with the interaction he had had with the Environment Centre. According to this interviewee, the general communication was fine but communication related to certain subject

matters, such as environmental protection, water protection, ground waters and environmental permits, did not work at all. Single negative issues and events had a big impact on attitudes and feelings towards the Environment Centre in certain districts, according to this interviewee.

"yleistä viestintää, mitä on ollu, ni se... se nyt on ollu suht hyvääkin niinkun joittenkin asioitten osalta, että jos ajattelee vaikka tämmöstä jotai luonnonmonimuotoisuuden su- yleisuunnittelua tai vastaavaa [...] Mut sitten taas... sitten taas jotku tämmönen niinkun... ympäristönsuojeluun tai vesien suojelun osalta oleva viestintä niin... ni se saattaa nyt taas olla semmosta, et se menee sitten vähän läpi korvien puolin ja toisin." (general communication, it has been quite good too, with regard to some matters, if you think of, for example, general planning related to biodiversity [...] But then again some... like communication related to environmental protection or water protection, it can be a bit such that none of the parties turn a deaf ear to.) (P4)

Furthermore, the interviewee felt that the feedback from the side of the Environment Centre, and the environmental administration more generally, was always negative, ignoring the good progress made by the industry that the organization in question was a representative of. This was to an extent that the interviewee felt the industry could not change its public image unless and until the environmental administration gave a positive signal, some recognition for the work that had been done. Moreover, he felt that the environmental administration in general lacked the willingness to discuss and negotiate, being too straightforward and rigid in its actions. Communication, according to him, lacked interactivity, consisted of "speaking past" one another and felt meaningless without any effect.

"puhutaan ihan sujuvasti toistemme ohi. [...] jääny vähän semmonen käsiste, käsitys, et sillä niinku keskusteluyhteydellä ei ole kovin paljoa merkitystä, et ei siihen käytännön toimintaan vaikuta millään tavalla." (we are quite fluently speaking past each other. [...] left me with that kind of impression that communication does not have much effect and that it does not influence the actual behaviour or activities in any way.) (P4)

This same interviewee felt also somewhat frustrated with the relationship, which was related to another category, partnership that two interviewees had some bad experiences of. An unclear division of roles and duties between the Environment Centre and the organization of one interviewee was another issue mentioned.

Finally, there were some negative experiences mentioned by a single interviewee. These included procedures and actions related to regulating one industry sector, which according to an interviewee, were not logical but, instead, based on details that ignored the bigger picture and, thus, further caused distrust among their members. The same interviewee felt the environmental administration had not recognized the concern the organization in question had for the future of their industry – a topic related to differences in values and attitudes that followed them. In addition, one

interviewee mentioned he had some negative indirect experiences related to communication of the Environment Centre. Although secondary or indirect, the interviewee used rather strong impressions to describe them, such as lack of discussion, authoritative attitude, dictating orders, aggressive approach, ignoring others' opinions as well as lack of flexibility and ability to discuss. Last, one interviewee had some bad experiences related to some people.

"itselleni tulee semmonen vastenmielinen ote, jos virkamies käyttää valtaa... mitenkä mä nyt sanoisin oikein, siis tämmöseen vähän niinku henkilöpersoonaan liittyvistä näkökulmista, että jos haluaa olla hankala, ni pystyy olemaan hankala, jos haluaa olla neuvova, ni pystyy olemaan neuvova" (I get disgusted if a public official uses power... how to say, from perspectives related to a personality, so that if a person wants to be troublesome, he can be troublesome, if a person wants to be helpful, he can be helpful) (P8)

6.3 Relationship

This chapter consists of results that answer the second research question: "How do the stakeholders perceive their relationship with the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre?" It is composed of six chapters related to relationship and its purpose, mutual control, trust, commitment and satisfaction, communal relationship and exchange relationship, and changes.

6.3.1 Relationship and Its Purpose

To study the relationship the stakeholders had with the Environment Centre the interviewees were first asked to describe their relationship with the Environment Centre. Moreover, the interviewees were asked what they perceived was the purpose of their relationship. The descriptions of the relationship were divided into four categories: positive, negative, neutral and mixed. Half of the interviewees, i.e. four, described their relationship in mainly neutral terms. Three interviewees, on the other hand, had a mixed tone in describing the relationship. Finally, one interviewee described the relationship in mainly positive terms. Table 4 presents the distribution of the answers between different interviewees related to the description of the relationship.

TABLE 4 Description of the Relationship

	Description of the Relationship
1.	neutral (4)
2.	mixed (3)
3.	positive (1)

The purpose of the relationship, on the contrary, was connected to five main topics. In addition, some secondary objectives were mentioned. Moreover, all together five interviewees presented some problems related to the relationship and suggestions for improving it. Next, these previously outlined findings are presented more closely.

6.3.1.1 Description of the Relationship

Neutral assessments were most common when the interviewees described their relationship with the Environment Centre. The most common assessment was factual/formal, mentioned by four interviewees. The relationship was described, for example, as based on facts and interesting or relevant issues. Moreover, it was described as formal: certain formal procedures, such as sending the required reports, giving statements when asked and getting an expert member for projects, dominated the relationship. The second most mentioned assessment was distant/sparse mentioned by two interviewees. Contacts were limited to when something had to be asked or consulted about from one side or another.

"Kyl se semmonen aika väljä on että... tosiaan että, kun asiat tulee mielenkiintosta tietoa siltä puolelta tai sitten tulee mielenkiintosta kysyttävää tältä puolelta joskus, niin se on lähinnä sitä että niinku että... että sitä muuten sitä kontaktia kyllä valitettavasti ei ole että." (It is quite loose... when things, when some interesting information comes from that side or sometimes something interesting to ask from this side, it is pretty much it... otherwise there is no contact unfortunately.) (P1)

Equally two interviewees mentioned the relationship as being regular and continual. For example, one interviewee described the relationship with a metaphor of a personal or family doctor that you see once or twice a year hoping that everything is ok so that no extra visits are needed. The relationship being distant was in contrast to the assessment of one interviewee according to whom the relationship was substantial including a good deal of co-operation. Moderately positive neutral comments included "good relations" and "cooperation works", mentioned by two interviewees, as well as "nice people".

Next, mixed assessments were based on the perspectives of three interviewees. One of them felt the relationship was "promising". It was not yet clearly positive but instead "emergent". Another interviewee had a more negative perspective. According to this interviewee, the relationship was marked by a "bureaucratic touch": it was neither helpful nor proactive but consisted of keeping the power and evaluating things afterwards. A third interviewee felt describing the relationship with the organization as a whole was difficult as it varied a lot according to issues and people involved. The role of people and "personal chemistry" were underlined.

"aika paljo riippuu niistä asioista ja et kenen, kenen kanssa tota asioi tai keskustelee, et se on siinä mielessä vaihtelevaa, et siellä aika paljo tulee sit ne niinkun, aina niinku ne henkilökohtaset kemiät sitten, kemiät siinä sitten merkkää." (quite a lot depends on matters and with whom you deal with or discuss, in that sense it is varying, personal chemistry counts quite a lot.) (P4)

Finally, one interviewee gave a mainly positive answer regarding the relationship. The Environment Centre was considered "a good partner" from whom expert help could be received when ever needed. Although the tone of this answer was positive, the interviewee mentioned also one "eternal project" they had with the Environment Centre and which had involved some "not so easy issues" as well.

6.3.1.2 Purpose of the Relationship

The interviewees described the purpose of their relationship with the Environment Centre in diverse ways. The purpose of the relationship was most commonly connected with 1) complying with the law, 2) balancing of industrial activities, 3) maintaining healthy countryside, 4) advancement of nature protection and 5) news agenda.

One perspective that stood out from the rest was related to complying with the law, referred to by three interviewees. Comments included, for example, "complying with laws and decrees" and "cooperation between regional and local organizations in matters that belonged to the sphere of authority of the Environment Centre". One interviewee continuing with the personal doctor metaphor described the purpose as "sending the results of blood tests at regular intervals" and getting "clean papers" as well as problem solving in case some interference occurred. This was considered execution of the permission procedure and, thus, regarded as complying with the law.

Next, two interviewees referred to balancing of industrial activities or carrying on business or another source of livelihood taking into account the environment. One of the interviewees was involved in developing a new branch of industry for which the expertise of the Environment Centre was needed in order to ensure environmental sustainability. Related to these two perspectives was the assessment of a third interviewee who spoke about "maintaining a healthy and safe countryside" with sufficient possibilities of making a living – finding a balance between sustainability and profitability.

Finally, one interviewee mentioned advancement of nature protection as a fundamental goal of the relationship while another interviewee answered that the purpose of the relationship was strongly influenced by the "news situation".

In addition to the main purpose, the interviewees described some secondary objectives of the relationship. These included, for example, practical division of duties so that no overlapping work would be done. Related to this was the recognition of roles and responsibilities of different actors. Proactivity was mentioned here too – in a sense that the so-called useless work should be avoided from the side of public officials by giving support and counselling in a proactive way. In addition, it was mentioned that achieving some goals of one's own was equally relevant in a relationship. Moreover, distribution of information and use of the expertise of the Environment Centre for the public good were mentioned. Finally, one interviewee stressed the importance of reducing prejudice against the Environment Centre in the countryside as well as preventing contradictions from arising between different actors in the countryside.

6.3.1.3 Suggestions for Improving the Relationship

When asked to describe their relationship with the Environment Centre, and the purpose of it, the majority of the interviewees, i.e. five, presented also some problems related to the relationship and suggestions for improving it.

For example, one of the interviewees who perceived the relationship as distant felt that personal contacts could be helpful in that respect, expanding the relationship beyond single issues and cases. This same interviewee, the representative of the media, who considered the purpose of the relationship being connected with the changing news situation, felt that it would be good to discuss things more as a whole. Town planning in terms of business premises was given as an example.

“joskus niinku näissä ympäristöasioissa nii vois olla semmonen kysymykseen että [...], ettei ois aina vaan semmosia... senhetkinen tää uutistilanne vaan että [...] joskus ois kiva tämmösistä kokonaisuuksistaki keskustella enemmän että. [...] kaavotusasiat on tämäntyyppisiä [...] että niinku istus alas ja vähän kattos, että missä niinku mennään että.”
(sometimes in these environmental matters it could be the case that [...] it would not always be that kind of... the news situation of the moment but instead [...] sometimes would be nice to talk more about bigger perspectives. [...] town planning would be such [...] that you sit down and see a bit where we are currently going. (P1)

Another interviewee, who regarded the relationship as routine-like and formal, the purpose of it being connected to complying with the law, said they did not know in their organization whether the relationship could be developed in some way. Consequently, the interviewee hoped for some more marketing from the side of the Environment Centre about opportunities to do collaboration in the field of research in terms of supervision or even funding their organization could provide. The interviewee who perceived the relationship as variable suggested that better understanding of the

industrial context from the side of the Environment Centre would help the situation.

Furthermore, one interviewee felt the Environment Centre sometimes interfered with things that did not belong to its sphere of authority. This was related to unclarity about roles – cooperation between different actors across sectors was still in its infancy. A solution could be to gather around one table to discuss and think things through as it was increasingly done related to preparation of different regional programs.

“jotenki siellä tuntuu, että tavoiteasettelussa menee joskus vähän niinku puurot ja vellit sekasin, et sinne mennään sitte härkkimään sellasille alueille, jotka ei välttämättä oo ympäristökeskuksen asioita, esimerkiks johonki energiantuotannon rakenteeseen” (somehow it feels that in their goal setting they mix up porridge with gruel so that they interfere with areas that do not necessarily belong to the affairs of the Environment Centre, such as the structure of energy production) (P5)

Finally, the relationship marked by “a bureaucratic touch” could be improved with a more service-oriented approach. As the activities of the Environment Centre were funded by tax revenues, the attitude should be such that the expertise of the Environment Centre should be made available as widely and thoroughly as possible – not only for evaluating outcomes but also as a support for how to arrive at a certain outcome.

6.3.2 Mutual Control

Mutual control in the relationship was studied with two main questions: one, to which extent the interviewees felt the Environment Centre took into consideration what their organization had to say and, two, whether the interviewees felt they had a chance to influence the actions of the Environment Centre which in turn had influence on them. These two aspects of mutual control were analyzed separately according to categories positive, negative, neutral and mixed. Half of the interviewees, i.e. four, answered positively and felt that their views were taken into consideration. Three had mixed perspectives and one answer was neutral. In terms of chances to influence, again half of the participants felt positive about having chances to influence while three interviewees had mixed perspectives. Table 5 summarizes the overall distribution of answers to mutual control between different interviewees. Next, these findings are described in more detail.

TABLE 5 Mutual Control

	Considering Stakeholders' Views	Chances to Influence
1.	positive (4)	positive (4)
2.	mixed (3)	mixed (3)
3.	neutral (1)	

6.3.2.1 Taking Stakeholders' Views into Consideration

Positive answers to consideration of stakeholder views, recalled by four interviewees, included, for example, getting the desired information and listening to the local points of view. Another interviewee mentioned that suggestions and proposals for development by their organization had been well considered. One interviewee was pleased with the process of giving statements: the hearing period was long enough, there was a chance to get additional information, and the material package, including the presentation of the case and the statement of the Environment Centre, was good.

Mixed perspectives were cited by three interviewees. Two interviewees felt that nowadays the Environment Centre considered their opinions, but in the past there had been some disagreements and negative experiences too. These were related to differences in the organizations and goals as well as people and personalities.

"varmaa aika hyvin nykyisin, että ehkä aikasemmin ei välttämättä, välttämättä nii, nii hyvi että tuota... et ehkä siinä liittyy tietysti se, että me ollaa organisaationa, ollaa hiuka erilaisia ja sitten tuota, meillä o hiukan erilaisia tavoitteita tietyissä asioissa" (probably quite well nowadays but earlier not necessary so well... maybe it is related to the fact that as organizations we are quite different and then we have a bit different goals in certain matters) (P3)

Another interviewee pointed out that the Environment Centre had to act according to laws and regulations which naturally resulted in a "a taste of bureaucracy" but which could be moderated with interactivity. A third interviewee with a mixed perspective felt the degree of consideration varied according to issues in question.

"Vaihtelevasti, joissakin asioissa ei yhtään ja joissakin sillee, että minäkin oon tyytyväinen." (Variably, in some matters not at all, and in some others in a way that even I am satisfied.) (P4)

Positive examples were related to good interaction as well as reaching mutual understanding and satisfaction. Negative examples, related to some subject matters, included incompatibility of attitudes and values, coercive means and orders.

Finally, one interviewee, whose relationship with the Environment Centre was still young, had a neutral perspective: it remained to be seen how far the Environment Centre would consider the perspectives of the organization in question.

6.3.2.2 Chances to Influence

In terms of chances to influence, four interviewees felt positive. Positive answers were based, for example, on matters that had common interface and openness from the side of the Environment Centre towards new, innovative ideas in some development projects. Moreover, participation in work group meetings, where an interviewee was called upon to speak, as well as cooperation in mutual understanding in some municipal matters were considered ways to influence. According to one interviewee, positive influencing was based on sufficient providing of information, regular interaction and proactivity.

“vaikuttaa myönteisessä mielessä, ni se varmaan on se, että sitä tietoa ja taustoja tulee riittävästi, riittävästi ympäristökeskuksen virkamieskunnan tietoon, ni se varmasti auttaa sitten myöskin asioiden arvioinnissa, ja sillä tavalla, taas palataan tähän perus-case:iin, siihen säännölliseen vuorovaikutteisuuteen ja ennakoitavuuteen” (to influence in a positive sense, I guess it is that you provide the officials of the Environment Centre with sufficient information and backgrounds, so I guess that helps also evaluating things, and in that way we return to the basic case, which is regular interaction and proactivity) (P8)

The mixed responses with regard to chances for influencing, given by three interviewees, were related to, for example, differences between issues and subject matters. Negative examples regarded, for example, ignoring opinions and unwillingness to discuss. The words of an interviewee, who had the most negative experiences out of the eight interviewees on the level of all the questions and themes, well encapsulate the root of the problems the organization had in relation to the Environment Centre – little or no chances at all to influence.

“mitä on niinku koettu ongelmoiks, ni sen niinku tuntee, et ei oo ollu vaikutusmahollisuuksia tai tavallaan, et sillä ei niinku annettu mitää, mitään niinkun painoarvoa tai et mistä ei oo välttämättä haluttu keskustella ees niistä asioista.” (things that we have felt as problems, it is that you feel that you have not had chances to influence, or in a way that the problems have not been given any, any importance or that there has not even been willingness to discuss them.) (P4)

Another interviewee, on the contrary, had no desire as such to influence the Environment Centre. The goal of this person, as a journalist, was to produce objective information. Finally, according to one interviewee, the matters and tasks defined by law, which the Environment Centre was in charge of, should not even be influenced and in its role as a public authority, the Environment Centre had “sovereignty”.

6.3.3 Trust

Trust among the stakeholders was studied with four main questions. The first dimension, integrity, was inquired by asking the interviewees to describe situations where the Environment Centre had treated their organization in a fair and just, or an unfair and unjust way. Second, dependability was examined in terms of whether the interviewed stakeholders could trust the Environment Centre kept its promises or did not keep its promises. Third, competence was based on two different questions: one, how confident the interviewees were that the Environment Centre could achieve what it said it would and, two, how confident they were about the expertise of the information produced by the Environment Centre. The answers were analyzed according to categories positive, negative, neutral and mixed. Related to integrity, the answers were divided between positive and neutral, mentioned by three interviewees, as well as mixed, cited by two interviewees. Dependability received mainly positive answers, from six interviewees, as well as one mixed and one negative response. The answers to the first aspect of the competence were mainly mixed, cited by six interviewees, accompanied by one positive and one neutral answer while to the second aspect the equivalent numbers were five, two and one. Table 6 summarizes the overall distribution of responses with regard to trust, as explained above. Next, these findings are presented in more detail.

TABLE 6 Trust

	Integrity	Dependability	Competence I	Competence II
1.	positive (3) / neutral (3)	positive (6)	mixed (6)	mixed (5)
2.	mixed (2)	mixed (1) / negative (1)	positive (1) / neutral (1)	positive (2)
3.				neutral (1)

6.3.3.1 Integrity and Dependability

According to three interviewees, the Environment Centre had treated them in a fair and just way. Positive examples included, for example, “sparring”, “developing collaboration” and being “a support and a partner”. According to one interviewee, the treatment they had got was appropriate and things had progressed just fine. Although it was mentioned that sometimes the inhabitants of the municipality might be unsatisfied when, for example, permit matters did not go according to their wishes.

Neutral responses, which were also three, had a mainly neutral tone considering the treatment they had got neither fair and just nor unfair and unjust, or else, no examples, neither positive nor negative, were given. One felt that in the past there were also some negative examples which, however,

did not apply in the present day anymore. As a result, the overall feeling the interviewee had was considered neutral.

Finally, two interviewees had mixed perspectives on integrity. One felt there were both cases, positive and negative, depending on issues and people in question. For another interviewee an unclear division of roles had caused feelings of unfairness. The same interviewee mentioned, however, that the basic principle in interorganizational relations was fairness towards one another and in the activities of public authorities fairness in terms of complying with laws and regulations.

"viranomaiselle niinku peruslähtökohta, että sen pitää niinku lähteä niinku lakie ja faktojen pohjalta niissä asioissa, et ei, ei saa niinku vaikuttaa muut tekijät niinku siihe." (for a public official the basic principle is that it has to be based on laws and facts, other issues should not affect.) (P3)

Responses related to dependability, on the contrary, were more straightforward as six interviewees felt they could trust the Environment Centre kept its promises. Positive examples were related to, for example, getting the desired information in contrast to some other authorities that, according to one interviewee, tried to avoid giving information. Another interviewee referred to getting an expert statement when needed as well as a speaker to some events of their organization. One interviewee felt their organization was familiar with the operative model of the Environment Centre, and no deviations or abnormalities had been observed even when people had changed. Two interviewees, on the contrary, took trust for granted: one, the actions of public officials had to be such that they could be trusted, or else the court of justice should be addressed and, two, trust was part of normal interaction among Finns.

"oikeestaan niinku näissä normaaleissa operatiivisissa toiminnoissa nii... minust se on nyt on semmosta, ihan semmosta normaalia kontaktointia ja jotka, ja ja ja niinku tämmöstä normaalia käy... niinku vuorovaikutusta että, et näinhän suomalaiset aina tekee" (actually in these normal operative functions... in my opinion, it is kind of normal contact keeping and normal interaction, that's the way Finns always do) (P2)

For one interviewee, representing a mixed response, keeping of promises varied according to different cases, subject matters and people involved. Moreover, this interviewee felt there was a lack of trust among the rank and file members of the organization towards the Environment Centre. Rooted in the past, it currently hindered the promotion of environmental issues among them. Re-establishing of trust was considered the biggest communications challenge for the Environment Centre vis-à-vis this organization, requiring considerable, long-term efforts. Finally, one interviewee gave a negative answer as he felt that related to dependability and trust, the Environment Centre had an image problem in comparison to other regional authorities.

According to this interviewee, there was mistrust among the citizens based on some past issues, such as Natura 2000, which had created negative publicity, as well as activities of other environmental sector actors, namely environmental organizations and activists. People could not count on the "treatment being objective".

6.3.3.2 Competence

Responses to competence in terms of achieving what was said showed mainly mixed results. Four interviewees felt the Environment Centre could achieve what it said it would but with certain restrictions. According to one interviewee, for example, challenges in the environmental sector were so great that probably no organization could fulfil them one hundred per cent. Along the same lines, another interviewee considered the scale of activities and tasks of the Environment Centre so vast that top expertise could not be granted for each matter. Related to those cases when the expertise was missing, the same interviewee felt the Environment Centre could consult external instances instead of moving ahead with "a gut feeling" in order to keep the power and the final decision making in its own hands.

Moreover, it was considered that every organization had need for further training and familiarization with regard to new things. Related to that, one interviewee criticized the way the Ministry of the Environment sometimes gave orders, which the regional environment centres in turn tried to enforce and apply without relevant training from the side of the ministry. In addition, one interviewee perceived the working culture of the Environment centre somewhat too rigid, formal and hierarchical, and in need of more flexibility and critical assessment of internal working methods. This was found related to internal organization and culture – the culture of presenting officials, concentration of responsibilities at the top of the organization and leader-centeredness, as the executive manager was seen to have too much control over things.

Related to mixed assessments, furthermore, two interviewees felt the achievement of goals depended on the resources the Environment Centre was granted by the state. When tasks and obligations were increasing, issues and subject matters becoming more complex, and the cases that required competence of the Environment Centre growing in number, the interviewees were concerned whether the resources would be sufficient to maintain the quality of services and to perform the tasks in the future too.

"toivos tietysti valtion puolelta että, että, että ympäristökeskustenkin resurssointi on siinä mitassa, mitä niiden tehtävät ja kasvavat tehtävät ovat nyt ja myöski tulevaisuudessa."
(you would hope from the side of the state that the resources of the environment centres are up to the level what their tasks and growing tasks are now and also in the future.) (P8)

Finally, related to competence and achievement of what was said, one interviewee gave a positive comment referring to the law that defined the tasks of the Environment Centre and to internal control and monitoring systems that together ensured the Environment Centre could not act “to its own liking” alone. Another interviewee, on the contrary, gave a neutral statement saying he did not know about the competence of the Environment Centre but power it did have.

Similarly, the second aspect of competence, the expertise of the information the Environment Centre produced, showed some mixed results. Five interviewees were mainly confident about expertise of the information but mentioned some limitations too. For example, the information was described to repeat itself, the source of the information was not always clear and sometimes based even on newspaper articles. Facts about nature were considered more trustworthy than certain small reports.

“päällisin puolin luotan siihen mutta oon havainnu, että sitten tässä niinku ympäristökeskuksella, niinku muillakin viranomaisillakin sitten taas, että kierretään tässä tie-tiedon, tiedon luotettavuudessa kierretään kehää sitten helposti [...] tavallaan niinku tässä, niinku tässä tietomeressä kiertää ne samat tiedot, sitten virkamies lukee lehdestä, tekee selvityksen, toimittaja kirjottaa taas eteenpäin” (on the face of it I trust it but I have noticed that the Environment Centre as well as some other authorities easily go around in circles with the trustworthiness of information [...] in a way this ocean of information is circulated by the same information, a public official reads in the newspaper, makes a report, a journalist writes onwards) (P1)

Another interviewee felt that the use of information was limited by bad accessibility: instead of offering information directly to customers, the customers were expected to find the information by themselves due to which it remained unused. Moreover, in matters with less know-how consulting other instances was suggested. One interviewee felt information was trustworthy as long as some “political drivers” did not govern it. According to him, political motivations created “shadows of distrust” on top of the information. Finally, one interviewee felt information that was produced could be supported or accompanied by some additional information on the perspectives of other authorities or actors to make the information more influential.

Two interviewees, further, gave positive responses on the trustworthiness of information without any doubts or negative examples. Some special credit was given to juridical matters where the help received was perceived as very thorough. Finally, one interviewee perceived the level of expertise of the information produced by the Environment Centre as neutral describing it “on an average normal”, not worthy to praise nor complain about.

6.3.4 Commitment and Satisfaction

Commitment was explored through asking whether the interviewees could give examples that showed the Environment Centre wanted to commit to a long-term relationship or did not want such a relationship with their organization. Satisfaction, on the contrary, was studied by asking how satisfied or dissatisfied the interviewees were with their relationship with the Environment Centre. With regard to commitment, the answers were divided into four categories: positive, negative, neutral and mixed. Five interviewees gave a positive response and felt the Environment Centre wanted to have a long-term relationship with their organization while two gave a neutral response and one interviewee a mixed response. The answers to satisfaction, on the other hand, were analyzed in terms of school grades – excellent (10), very good (9), good (8), satisfactory (7), passable (5–6) and discarded (4). As half of the interviewees, i.e. four, were “quite satisfied” with their relationship, the average or the most common school grade was “good”, equivalent to 8. Two interviewees gave a “very good”, equivalent to 9, while two others a “seven”. Table 7 gives a summary of the findings, which are presented in more detail next.

TABLE 7 Commitment and Satisfaction

	Commitment	Satisfaction
1.	positive (5)	8 – good (4)
2.	neutral (2)	9 – very good (2) / 7 – satisfactory (2)
3.	mixed (1)	

6.3.4.1 Commitment

The majority of answers, representing five interviewees, were positive, i.e., the interviewees felt the Environment Centre wanted to build a long-term relationship with their organization. Examples on positive assessments included regularity of cooperation, preparing things in cooperation and chances for participation. One interviewee mentioned that requests for participation in Master’s thesis studies were another sign of commitment to a long-term relationship. Two interviewees felt that willingness to commit to a long-term relationship had come up when dealing with issues as large as climate change, which required long-term commitment. Once again, the importance of sufficient resources from the side of the state for the Environment Centre to take care of its tasks in “due time” was underlined.

Neutral assessments that were two included a perspective that commitment was somewhere halfway. One interviewee, for example, felt the relationship lacked some perseverance and long-term perspective. As in many other instances of the interviews, knowing people better and building personal contacts was proposed as a solution.

“ehkä semmonen, lievästi semmonen, pitkäjänteisyyttä puuttuu sitten, että vaikka niinku asiat hoituu, hyvinkin, niin tuota, just se että ois kiva tuntea ehkä ihmisiä paremmin että... sitä organisaatiota. Se on aina sitte helpompi asioida, ku tietää kenen kanssa puhuu.” (maybe some, slightly some persistence is missing, so that although things get dealt with, even well, it would be maybe nice to know people better... the organization. It is always easier to deal when you know with whom you are talking.) (P1)

Another interviewee felt the relationship was a stable or routine-like custom or practice, there was no special “hype” in it. It was mentioned, though, that the director of the Environment Centre could participate in their Christmas lunch for example every other year.

“me ollaan tässä niinku ihan niinku veroviranomainen tai kuka tahansa, että ei-i siinä ny minust niinku mitään sellasta haippia ole.” (we are here like a tax authority or anyone so that in my opinion there is not any kind of hype in it.) (P2)

One interviewee, on the other hand, gave a mixed response concerning commitment. Being a third sector organization, the relationship they had with the Environment Centre was not statutory. In addition, the organization did not have economic importance, and it was not the only actor in the respective field.

6.3.4.2 Satisfaction

The most common evaluation of the relationship on the level of school grades was “good”, equivalent to a grade 8 in the Finnish school system, as half of the interviewees felt “quite satisfied” with their relationship with the Environment Centre. This was expressed with comments such as “remains on the credit side”, “superficially quite satisfied”, “as a whole quite satisfied” and “nowadays satisfied”. Positive examples were related to accessibility to information, openness in providing information as well as progress and proceeding of things. One interviewee mentioned it “showed outside” that communication had been “thought about” and planned: for example, additional information and contact person for press releases were generally available. Moreover, one interviewee referred to a division of roles that unlike in the past currently worked well in contrast to another interviewee for whom an unclear division of roles was still a cause for dissatisfaction.

“kyllä nykyisin, ihan voi sanoa, että olen tyytyväinen [...] aikasemmin maailma oli varmasti näi että, että siinä oli, oli vähän sellasta, että ei ollu oikeen molemmin puolin roolit oikein selvillä ja sit et saatto tulla tämmösiä asioita, että vähä mentiin reunan yli.” (yes nowadays, I can quite say I am satisfied [...] earlier it was surely so that there was a little bit of such that the roles were not quite clear both sides, and then it could happen that we slightly went off the line.) (P8)

The second most common assessments related to satisfaction corresponded to school grades 9, "very good", and 7, "satisfactory", mentioned by two interviewees both. Comments that described a "very good" relationship or satisfaction included "grade very good or A-" and "I am very satisfied". Satisfaction was related to, for example, good relations and knowing people, the relevant partners, personally.

"Erittäin tyytyväinen, kyllä, koska tietysti kun mä nyt itse tunnen sillä tavalla A:n ja B:n ja C:n, jotka mun mielestä niinku on niitä keskeisiä kumppaneita tässä, niissä asioissa, joissa mä olen asioinnu" (Very satisfied, yes, because as I know personally A, B and C who, according to me, are relevant partners in the things I have been dealing with) (P6)

Two interviewees whose assessment was satisfactory both stated that if they had to give a school grade, it would be "somewhere around seven". The grade seven was said to indicate that something had been achieved but a lot was still to be done to get a "very good" grade. Moreover, for another interviewee the rising or falling of the grade depended on the results of a project this interviewee was involved in cooperation with the Environment Centre.

6.3.5 Communal Relationship vs. Exchange Relationship

To study the type of relationship the studied organizations had with the Environment Centre, the interviewees were asked, first, whether they felt the Environment Centre was interested in achieving some common goals with their organization even without any direct benefits in return, or two, whether the Environment Centre took their organization into consideration to better achieve some goals of its own. Answers to the two questions regarding the type of relationship, communal or exchange, were analyzed together. Responses were somewhat mixed. Three interviewees felt the relationship was communal but presented also some limitations. The response of two other interviewees, on the contrary, tended towards an exchange relationship while two others gave no positive signal for either one of the relationship types. Finally, one interviewee felt the relationship included both aspects, exchange and communal. Table 8 describes the summary of these findings, which are presented in more detail next.

TABLE 8 Type of Relationship

	Type of Relationship
1.	communal relationship (3)
2.	exchange relationship (2) / neither one (2)
3.	communal + exchange relationship (1)

6.3.5.1 Communal Relationship or Exchange Relationship?

The three interviewees who perceived the relationship as communal felt that the so-called “big goal”, long-term objective on a larger scale or the big picture was shared and understood although in single matters there might have been some disagreements and controversies. Moreover, it was perceived that in order to achieve desired goals, cooperation was necessary. However, some problematic points or challenges were pointed out too. For example, many issues, such as energy questions like peat, were considered contradictory with no one and only truth available. From the point of view of the media, for example, the environmental standpoint was only one view among other possible perspectives.

Another interviewee felt two opposite forces, environmental values and market economy, with contradictory goals, pressurized their organization. Considering the environment did not currently give any added value for their activities. Moreover, in a large organization, such as a municipality, commitment to common goals without direct benefit could be hindered by the fact that for some elected officials, for example, the Environment Centre might seem distant and unfamiliar. Citizens, on the other hand, could feel themselves powerless in the face of large, global issues, such as the climate change. Although with some restrictions and complications, all three interviewees considered communal relationship an ideal.

“emmä osaa vaihtokauppahommaa, mä ehkä niinku kauheesti kuitenkin usko [...], että kyllähän se lähtökohta kuitenkin hyvää hyvää tarkottaminen on eri osapuolilla sitten että.” (I can't say exchange thing, I don't believe very much [...] I guess the basic principle is meaning well from boths the sides.) (P1)

In contrast, two other interviewees felt the relationship was more an exchange relationship. According to one of them, the Environment Centre did not participate in something without direct or indirect benefit for itself. The same interviewee felt, however, that this kind of terminology “own goals” or “getting something in return” when speaking about an exchange relationship did not exactly match the public sector context. Another interviewee, on the contrary, considered communal relationship an ideal but felt that the reality was still somewhat different. Common resources, according to him, should be used for the common good, and the relationship should be based on proactivity, predictability and large perspectives. However, the actions were still marked by sector orientation and sector thinking, “insider games”, “sticking to one's own nest” and evaluating things afterwards in a reactive way.

“vielä ollaan liian, liian, että siin on, siinä on sellasta, siin on varmasti sellasta, vähä että halutaan niinku ikään kuin siinä omassa toimintapesässä pysyä” (we are still too much, that there is, there is that kind of a thing that people want, so to say, to stick to their own operative nest) (P8)

6.3.5.2 Mixed Perspectives

Two other interviewees answered in a way that neither communal nor exchange relationship seemed to correspond with their perspectives. For one of them the relationship was rather an official relationship based on an administrative procedure and an execution of their environmental permit. No common goals had ever been set, and why should they have, as the two organizations worked according to different principles: the Environment Centre in the role of a public official while the organization in question based on economic principles.

"et se on niinku just tämmönen, että viranomainen vaatii ja me tehdään, että eihän se oo sillai interaktiivinen tietenkään [...], ku se on hallintomenettely kuitenkin, se on luvan täytäntöönpanemista" (It is like this that the authority requires and we do, so it is not in that way interactive of course [...] as it is an administrative procedure, it is about implementing a permit) (P2)

Another interviewee, the representative of a non-governmental organization, was not sure whether the Environment Centre felt their organization was even worth considering as they had few resources and little influence, and issues in which they were a relevant actor were not so many. According to this interviewee, they had profited from the Environment Centre but the interviewee was not sure whether the Environment Centre had always done the same.

Finally, according to one interviewee, the relationship had both elements – common goals as well as individual objectives. Moreover, individual goals could also contribute to common objectives. For example, the Environment Centre could benefit from the work of the organization in question.

"Minä koe ainakii, että kyl meilläkii on niinku omia tavoitteita sillon ku yhteistyötä tehhää ja niitte editämine on siinä, et ei siihi muuten sitä aikaa käytettäs, et et... Et siin on kyllä nää molemmat, että." (At least I feel that we surely have some goals of our own when collaborating with somebody, and advancement of those goals is there, otherwise time would not be spent on it... So, there are the two things.) (P3)

6.3.6 Changes

Changes in the relationship were studied through two different dimensions: one, whether the relationship was perceived as changing or unchanging and, two, whether the relationship was open to new influences and changes or not. The answers to the former were divided between two opposite views, positive and negative: three interviewees perceived their relationship with the Environment Centre as changing while other three considered it unchanging. Two others gave a mixed response hoping the relationship would change. With regard to openness to change, responses were mainly

mixed representing the perspectives of five interviewees. Nevertheless, also here many felt the relationship should or hoped it would allow changes. Three, on the other hand, perceived the relationship as open to change. Table 9 presents the distribution of answers as explained above. In the following paragraphs, these findings are presented in more detail.

TABLE 9 Changes

	Dynamism	Openness to Change
1.	positive (3) / negative (3)	mixed (5)
2.	mixed (2)	positive (3)

6.3.6.1 Changing vs. Unchanging

Three interviewees perceived the relationship as changing. Two interviewees considered change a necessity or something that was inevitable. Moreover, they referred to ongoing organizational changes. With regard to the ALKU-project, however, the perspectives were contrasting: while one interviewee felt the reform would not change much as people and tasks would remain the same, another referred to changes it would bring, for example, related to environmental permits. A third interviewee felt that as the relationship was still in its infancy, under formation and development, it was changing.

The contrasting views on the relationship being unchanging, which were three as well, included, for example, a perspective that the relationship had followed the same lines for a long time already. Two interviewees felt that changelessness was related to people – as long as people remained the same, things would not change. One interviewee perceived changelessness as a positive thing, a signal of trust and stability.

”Se on niinku tämmönen, niinku stabiili, luotettava ja stabiili, et ei se oo niinku huono asia, et se on muuttumaton” (It is like stable, reliable and stable, so that it is not a bad thing that it is unchanging) (P2)

However, among the three interviewees, who felt the relationship was unchanging, two considered the ALKU-project a possible source for changes in the future, and one of them mentioned also the retirement of the director in the coming future.

The two mixed perspectives on the changing vs. unchanging nature of the relationship included one interviewee who felt the relationship had changed over time but wished it could have changed even more. By this interviewee, changes were regarded as something positive, synonymous to progress and “moving ahead with things”, as well as by another interviewee who responded by hoping the relationship was changing.

"Pitää taas sanoa, että toivon, että se on muuttuva, se on edistyvä." (I have to say again, I hope it is changing, it is progressing.) (P8)

6.3.6.2 Openness to Change

The mainly mixed perspectives, representing five interviewees, on the openness of the relationship to allow changes included two interviewees who felt the relationship should allow changes. Laws and regulations should not be regarded as factors hindering change, but the attitude should be towards moving ahead. Change was also considered dependant on the willingness of the people to contribute to "the common good" or hinder it.

"Et se on, mä niinku väittäisin, että aika paljo ihmisistä kiinni... Ja siitä, että halutaanko löytää sellasia toimintamalleja ja toimintamuotoja, jotka niinku tätä edistää tätä yhteistä hyvää." (It is, I would say, quite much dependent on the people... And whether they want to find such models and forms for acting which enhance this common good.) (P8)

Moreover, one interviewee was hoping the relationship allowed changes – that both ways there would be a readiness to look at things from a new perspective if needed. It was considered that certain attitudes hindered change. Another interviewee, in contrast, hoped that the relationship would remain unchanging also in the future. Finally, one interviewee felt the relationship had not allowed changes as well as hoped. According to this interviewee, the Environment Centre had not welcomed a change that their organization had made related to their organizational structure and, in particular, the consequence the change had had for stakeholder relations at the managerial level. This was related to certain attitudes in the provincial capitals according to which stakeholder relations required managerial level presence and participation. In the opinion of this interviewee, stakeholder relations were two-way and instead of rejecting the change of the other party, channels and forms for cooperation should be sought together.

Finally, three interviewees felt the relationship was open to new influences and changes. One explanation, again, was the inevitable nature of changes to which also organizations had to adapt. No concrete examples were given but the overall spirit was considered favourable towards changes.

"Kyllä se mun mielestä sallii ja, ja tuota on, on tietysti ihan välttämätöntäki että, että tota niin niin, maailma muuttuu ja, ja ja sillan on myöski organisaatioiden muututtava ja tarkasteltava niitä omia, omia toimintatapoja ja mitä, mitä meiltä odotetaan." (Yes, according to me, it does allow, and well it is of course also necessary, as the world changes, also organizations have to change and look at their own workings and what we are expected.) (P7)

6.4 Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment

This chapter includes results that aim at answering the last research question: “What suggestions do the stakeholders have for the communication and the relationship in the new state authority?” It is composed of three chapters related to relationship in the ELY Centre, differences in communication between the three main partners in the ELY Centre – Central Finland Regional Environment Centre, Employment and Economic Development Centre for Central Finland and Central Finland Road Region – and suggestions for communication in the ELY Centre.

6.4.1 Relationship in the ELY Centre

When the interviewees were asked how they perceived their relationship with the Environment Centre in the new state authority, three interviewees gave a neutral response and felt the reform would not bring about many changes in the relationship. Three other interviewees regarded the reform mainly as a positive chance for, for example, developing the relationship and cooperation further. One interviewee, on the contrary, presented a mixed perspective hoping the relationship would remain and not be buried or lost inside the new big authority. Table 10 summarizes these perspectives.

TABLE 10 Relationship in the ELY Centre

	Description of the Relationship
1.	neutral (3) / positive (3)
2.	mixed (1)

In addition, the interviewees presented some hopes and possibilities, worries and challenges as well as some other comments with regard to the new state authority. Hopes and possibilities were most commonly cited and included perspectives from six interviewees. Worries and challenges were mentioned by three interviewees and other comments presented by two interviewees. Next, these findings are presented in more detail.

6.4.1.1 Hopes and Opportunities

The most common source of hopes and opportunities that all together six interviewees attached to the new state authority dealt with 1) widening of the perspective or cooperation, mentioned by four interviewees and 2) benefits related to synergy, mentioned by two interviewees.

Related to widening of the perspective and cooperation, one interviewee thought that the environmental point of view had to be better considered besides economic interests. Another interviewee estimated the expertise of the Environment Centre would be better integrated into different development projects. Moreover, one interviewee felt that the new authority could produce more cooperation between their organization and the Employment and Economic Development Centre. In addition, it was hoped the environmental perspective would be better taken into consideration with regard to traffic. Namely, one interviewee was hoping for new initiatives and policy proposals related to environmental impact of transportation of goods and through-traffic. In addition, related to environmental investments, it was hoped that economic interests and profitability would be better considered. Moreover, a commercial perspective could help the Environment Centre to market its know-how and information better.

"elinkeinoaspekti ja ympäristöaspekti, et ne ei oo toisiaan poissulkevia, vaan päinvastoin sieltä voi löytää vaik uusia mahdollisuuksia että, että niinkun, ja sehän voi olla että heille, heille tulis tämmöst kaupallista näkökulmaa sit sitä kautta, et niinku markkinoida sitä omaa tietoa ja markkinoida omaa osaamista" (industrial aspect and environmental aspect do not exclude each other, but on the contrary you can even find some new opportunities there, and it can be that they would get some commercial perspective that way to market their own information and to market their own know-how) (P2)

Benefits related to synergy, mentioned by two interviewees, dealt with considering things as a whole. As a consequence, dealing with the different authorities was thought to become easier. Moreover, efficiency in terms of workload and time use could be enhanced providing that sufficient interactivity between the three members of the new authority would be created right from the beginning.

"joitakin maankäytön asioita esimerkiks käsitellään nii, niin siitähän tulee hyvä, hyvä kokonaisuus, jos vaan niinkun löydetään sellasia pöytiä mihinkä, missä syntyy heti se vuorovaikutteisuus kerralla eikä tarvitse odottaa tuota, että ennen ku asia on käyny [...] tiepiirin pöydällä, ennen ku se on käyny ympäristökeskuksen pöydällä, ennen ku se on käyny TE-keskuksen jonku osaston pöydällä, nii sitte vasta tulee tulos" (some matters related to land use, for example, are handled, so it becomes a good entity, if only they find that kind of tables where interactivity is born at once, and not so that you have to wait before the matter has been [...] on the table of the Road Region, before it has been on the table of the Environment Centre, before it has been on the table of some department in the TE Centre, and after that only comes the result) (P8)

6.4.1.2 Worries and Challenges

Worries and challenges, on the other hand, came up in the answers of three interviewees. For example, one interviewee hoped the relationship would not be buried or lost in the new, big authority. Another concern was that the environmental perspective would become subordinate to, or dominated by,

economic matters. One interviewee was not concerned for the relationship as such but considered it a challenge how the new authority would start to operate internally, reconciling differing functions and perspectives, in particular, those of the Environment Centre and the Employment and Economic Development Centre. Finally, one interviewee encapsulated the threats of the new authority into three adjectives: "bureaucratic, obscure and domineering".

6.4.1.3 Other Comments

Other comments, given by two interviewees, covered 1) customer perspective and 2) change communication.

First, customer perspective was strongly underlined by these two interviewees. For example, they felt it was very important that customers would get sufficient guidance for the new authority. It was suggested the new authority could have a general information point where the customer could get help in the beginning of the new authority. Both interviewees were stressing the importance that the changes should not be made at the cost of the customers but, instead, if the new authority had, for example, several registry offices, the customer should be able to leave his or her documents in any of them.

"virastoje välistä päällekkyyttä poistetaa ja tehokkuutta lisätään, työn tuottavuutta lisätään, ni mun mielest niinku sitä ei saa sitte tehdä sen asiakkaan kustannuksella, et se asiakas juoksee paperi kourassa, et mihinkäs tää piti jättää" (overlaps between different authorities are reduced and efficiency increased, the productivity of work increased, but in my opinion it should not be done at the cost of the customer, so that the customer runs with a document in his hand and wonders where it had to be left) (P6)

Moreover, it was underlined that right from the beginning, the operative model and approaches of the new authority should be such that the customer perspective would be considered. The time when the new authority was being formed was regarded as a key moment for deep and thorough reflection of customers' needs and expectations.

"Ja se aika on just näin, että heti alusta lähtien uudella organisaatiolla [...] siitä asiakkaan näkökulmasta katottaan, minkälainen palapel... palvelukonsepti luodaan... Koska virkamies ei saa olla henkilö norsunluutornissa vaan sen pitää olla valmis tuottamaan semmosia palveluja, että se parhaiten palvelee sitä... asiakasta, minkä takia se organisaatio o olemassa." (And the time is exactly this way that right from the beginning with the new organization [...] from the customer's perspective you look what kind of puzzle... service concept is created... Because a public official should not be a person in an ivory tower but should be ready to produce such services which best serve... the customer for which it exists in the first place.) (P8)

Related to change communication, one interviewee felt it was very important that at the beginning of the new authority partners would be informed about the operative model, working culture, goals, rules, budget and resources as well as prioritizing – what would be done first, what next and in what way, what was possible and what not.

6.4.2 Differences in the Communication and Relationships between the Three Partners of the ELY Centre

When the interviewees were asked how their communication or relationship with the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre differed from their communication or relationship with the Employment and Economic Development Centre for Central Finland and Central Finland Road Region, four interviewees felt it did differ. Two other interviewees, on the contrary, felt differences were not so great while two interviewees were not able to answer the question.

Differences, cited by six interviewees, were related to: 1) interaction, 2) customer perspective 3) values, 4) exchange of information and 5) personal chemistry.

The most common source of differences, cited by five interviewees, was interaction. For example, one interviewee felt that the TE Centre and another interviewee felt that both, the TE Centre and the Road Region, had been more active towards their organizations in terms of keeping contacts. When asked whether this was related to common interests in subject matters, where especially the TE Centre was a more natural partner for both the interviewees, they felt it was only partly true: first, personal contacts had become a custom in the relationship with the TE Centre and, second, more proactivity was hoped from the side of the Environment Centre.

“siis ku o elinkeinoja kehittämässä, ni sillen tietysti luontainen yhteistyökumppani on TE-keskus, mutta tota niinku mä sanoin, ni tässä on kyllä yhtymäkohtia sitten näihin ympäristöasioihinki että, että toivos, että että siellä, sieltä oltas niinkun sillee proaktiivisesti näissä asioissa liikkeellä eikä reaktiivisesti, et sitte ku jotaki on tehty, ni sitten tullaan räksyttää” (now, when it is the case of developing industries, of course a natural partner is TE Centre, but like I said, there are some interests in common also with environmental matters, so one would hope that they would act proactively in these matters and not reactively so that when something is done, then they come and bark) (P5)

Two other interviewees, on the other hand, felt interaction with the TE Centre was more informal, based more on personal contacts. With the TE Centre, there were more one-to-one meetings, single contacts, phone calls and e-mails while with the Environment Centre more working group meetings and planned bigger meetings. One interviewee, on the other hand, felt that in terms of the number of contacts, their organization had most

contacts with the Environment Centre. Moreover, one interviewee described differences with regard to communication means and forms. According to this interviewee, the Environment Centre and the Road Region had more helpful and practical web pages than the TE Centre. This was related to the nature of information this interviewee was in need of from the TE Centre, the development of countryside: it was not limited to one authority and thus difficult to identify and find while the information related to the field of activities of the Environment Centre and the Road Region was clearer and more recognizable. Telephone service, on the other hand, was considered good at the TE Centre.

Next, customer perspective was related to the answer of two interviewees. For example, one interviewee estimated citizens had greater expectations towards the TE Centre and the Road Region in comparison to the actual resources they had. Another interviewee felt the TE Centre had most challenges among the three partners, as their assignment from a customer's point of view was somewhat unclear. People could easily identify the tasks and duties of the Environment Centre and the Road Region, but which matters belonged to the field of activities of the TE Centre and to which department, especially after the recent organizational change, was difficult to recognize. Moreover, customers might have difficulties in approaching the TE Centre, as they did not know the hierarchy or the structure of the organization.

"Ihmiset tunnistaa, mikä asia kuuluu tiepiirille ja mikä kuuluu ympäristökeskukselle, mut mikä asia kuuluu TE-keskukselle ja mille osastolle mikin menee, nyt ku vielä tuli tää uus organisaatiomuutoskin niin, niin asiakas ei tunnista sitä niin helposti." (People recognize which matter belongs to the Road Region and which belongs to the Environment Centre, but which matter belongs to the TE Centre and which department, now that the new organizational change came as well, is not so easy for the customer to recognize.) (P6)

Two interviewees, furthermore, cited differences in terms of values. For example, one interviewee perceived that the TE Centre and the Road Region had been more open towards society than the Environment Centre which had become a kind of "defensive bastion of environmental values", aside from the rest. Another interviewee referred to differences in attitudes and values where their organization and the TE Centre had common interests and concerns for the development of industries. Achieving mutual understanding and dealing with the TE Centre was easier, based on shared industrial perspective and expertise. Consequently, TE Centre enjoyed also more trust among their members.

Related to exchange of information, on the other hand, corresponding with the response of one interviewee, it was described how with the TE Centre it involved more background information – informal information that was not

necessarily a topic to communicate about but yet interesting and a possible source for a story in the media.

"TE-keskuksen kanssa on päästy [...] taustottavampaan ja tämmöseen että niinku, tämmöstä epävirallistakin tietoa sitten liikkuu että... Et hiljanen tieto on väärä sana tähän mut kuitenkin semmonen... tieto mikä voi voi olla kiinnostavaa josta voi niinku syntyä juttuja mut se ei oo mikään tiedotusasia... mikä tulee siis juttelemalla ja tapaamalla ihmisiä että." (With the TE Centre we have achieved [...] a more background information oriented and this kind of that also informal information flows... Tacid knowledge is a wrong term here but anyway that kind of... information that can be interesting and that can turn into stories but which is not any communication topic... which comes through talking and meeting up with people.) (P1)

Last, one interviewee thought "personal chemistry" worked better with the TE Centre than with the Environment Centre. "Common tune" was easier to find. This was the same interviewee who shared the common attitudes and values as well as the industrial perspective with the TE Centre.

6.4.3 Suggestions for the Communication and the Relationship in the ELY Centre

With regard to suggestions for communication in the ELY Centre, the interviewees were first asked which, according to them, were the most important communication means and forms that should be developed in the new state authority, the Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment. Second, the interviewees were asked if they could change one thing in their communication or relationship with the Environment Centre in the new state authority what it would be. With regard to the former, the interviewees mentioned six main communication means and forms to be developed in the ELY Centre. Proposed alterations, on the other hand, were related to four topics. In addition, there were some other suggestions the interviewees gave throughout the interviews, presented last. Next, these results are described in detail.

6.4.3.1 Communication Means and Forms to be Developed in the ELY Centre

Communication means and forms to be developed in the ELY Centre included: 1) personal contacts, 2) new information technology, 3) traditional electronic communication means, 4) communication through mass media, 5) electronic newsletter, 5) customer magazine and 6) telephone service.

Personal contacts, mentioned by six interviewees, included, for example, a personal approach, suggested by the representative of the media. Internet and e-mail were not perceived as effective since the media got such a vast

amount of information daily that noticing and finding certain information among all that they received was difficult. Moreover, it was suggested that knowing people, things were easier to deal with. One interviewee mentioned one-to-one discussions that were needed in some single issues and cases. In addition, personal contacts were regarded as a valuable resource – to have somebody to talk through things and to be contacted without formalities.

"ois o-ois vaikka ees yks ihminen siellä, jonka kanssa ois sellanen suhde, että vois niinku, tällee ilman muodollisuuksia niinku asioita, suht koht pienellä kynnyksellä niinku lähestyä."
(if there was even just one person with whom the relationship would be such that without formalities and at a relative ease you could approach matters.) (P5)

Cooperation and networking were said to take place between people – not organizations. One interviewee referred to "coffee parties" in a sense that personal contacts could not be replaced by any other means of communication. That way, common interests could be maintained and prejudices removed. The same interviewee felt meetings among relevant partners were important, such as the annual stakeholder meeting, where new personnel could introduce themselves and retiring officials could "come and say good bye". Finally, one interviewee pointed out that one could not depend exclusively on e-mails for keeping contacts but personal interaction was equally needed.

New information technology, mentioned by three interviewees, included examples, such as video conferences or Internet portals, where information and documents could flow, and were considered especially practical for interaction beyond the borders of the Central Finland region. Any new solutions required, however, "piloting" by a group of test users. A similar pilot study would have been once useful also for the current VAHTI system, which received a lot of criticism from one interviewee who considered the system "a dud". A project for renewing it should be launched soon.

"yli kymmenen vuotta vanha systeemi, jolle ei oo tehty yhtään mitään, mieti... et se ois sama ku sä tekisit suunnilleen niinko reikäkorteilla." (over ten years old system that has not been done anything about, figure that out... it is as if you were still using punch cards.) (P2)

Traditional electronic communication means, equally mentioned by three interviewees, included web pages, Internet and e-mail. Internet was considered useful for citizens and web pages a means through which certain materials, forms and instructions, as well as necessary links, could be accessed. One interviewee suggested an online help-desk where questions could be made around the clock, and the answering would not be bound to office hours either. In addition, to improve the web pages, a frequently asked questions and answers page was proposed as a useful addition. It was helpful not only for finding solutions to problems but also for seeing what kind of problems other customers dealt with.

Communication through mass media – newspapers, other print media as well as electronic media – referred to by two interviewees, were mentioned related to communicating with citizens. One interviewee described that the Environment Centre should take care of its public image among the citizens and pass on information about its role, tasks, activities and current topics to the media. This could be done through presentation of cases that the Environment Centre was involved with, such as water protection, which interested many people in the Central Finland region. Such activities, according to the interviewee, could be considered real communication in contrast to mere public information.

“se ei ole viranomaistiedotteita vaan se on viestintää – siel on asioita, siel on sisältöjä, siellä on kohderyhmä mitä, mitkä haluavat niitä asioita mitä todennäkösemmin lukea.” (it is not only public information but it is communication – there are topics, there are contents, there is a target group who most probably wants to read about those topics.) (P8)

Single mentions included an electronic newsletter about current topics for key stakeholders, or the so-called “nodes” of relevant networks – in municipalities, for example, the departments and officials who were customers of the Environment Centre – from whom the message could be further transmitted to other networks. A traditional printed customer magazine was also mentioned as well as a telephone service for situations where Internet was not available.

Finally, the interviewees presented some additional comments about communication in more general terms. For example, it was mentioned that the appropriate communication means depended on the target group while citizens should be addressed through as many means as possible. One interviewee, on the other hand, was hoping their organization could still be represented in official bodies, preparative working groups and discussions when decisions for policy proposals were made. Another interviewee hoped the Environment Centre would participate in different forums where environmental issues were discussed.

Moreover, communication should not be vague but it should invoke interest through interesting headlining, for example. Even when it regarded official matters, topics should be “sold” to the audience – not through promising pie in the sky but by making the issues interesting and human, explaining why a certain issue or a topic was important in the first place. One interviewee was hoping for a better understanding of business and industries and, in terms of communication, more consideration of the particularities of the sector in question. This was related to the comment of another interviewee who considered that in addition to the more general communication – for partners through electronic newsletter and for citizens through mass media – customers who were involved in certain cases should have more targeted communication.

6.4.3.2 One Thing to Be Changed in the Communication or Relationship

Proposed alterations were related to: 1) interaction, 2) information and development, 3) stakeholder/customer thinking and 4) ALKU-project.

Suggestions for change, related to the first topic, interaction, included comments from five interviewees. For example, one interviewee hoped for a meeting where the Environment Centre would inform about who communicates and about which matters in their organization. This was the same interviewee who hoped for more activeness from the Environment Centre with regard to media contacts and service. Another interviewee hoped for more openness in terms of talking through problematic issues instead of merely complaining. Explaining different point of views and the motives behind could enhance cooperation even if differences in opinions were sometimes justified and, thus, insoluble.

“viestinnässä ja sidosryhmässä, että nostettas sellaset niinku kitkaa aiheuttavat asiat niinku pöydälle ja juteltas ne halki, halki ja tuota katottas mitä, mitä niille niinku on tehtävä... tehtävissä [...], ni tuota ei jurnutettas niinku omissa porukoissa” (in communication and stakeholder, that you put into light issues that cause friction and talk them through and see what can be done to them [...], not that you complain among your own group) (P3)

Another interviewee hoped for a solution to a problematic subject matter that caused friction in the relationship between the Environment Centre and the organization in question, namely ground waters. The interviewee felt that attitudes between the two organizations were so different that they “fluently spoke past one another”. Lack of understanding from their side combined with no willingness to discuss from the side of the Environment Centre constituted a serious challenge communications-wise. In addition, based on some previous experiences, one interviewee was hoping for a more negotiating and proactive working culture, willingness for cooperation instead of opposition. The interviewee was not sure, however, whether this issue had already changed. Last, one interviewee hoped for a monthly newsletter about current issues and news, good and bad, related to, for example, the past and upcoming month, which could come as an e-mail invitation with a link to a relevant web page. It was not adequate that news were simply published on the web pages – people needed an impulse too.

“Joku sano, et no, eikö se riitä, et se on kotisivuilla. Ei se vaan näi riitä. Se viestintähän ei oo sitä, et sä oot kattanu pöydän ja kukaan ei tuu syömää.” (Somebody said that well, isn't it enough that it is on the homepage. Well it is not enough. Communication is not that you have set the table and nobody comes to eat.) (P6)

Next, the second topic for proposed alterations, information and development, included comments of two interviewees. One interviewee was hoping that in addition to an operative contact person, there would be

another contact person who would be in charge of the information and developmental aspect of the relationship. The aim would be a better accessibility and usability of information, and creating a more “developmental relationship”. Another interviewee hoped for a more target-oriented focus in the relationship. Interaction could be more planned and thought of beforehand, including prioritizing of issues that had to be dealt with and outlining of long-term objectives and goals.

The third topic, stakeholder/customer thinking, included comments from two interviewees equally. One interviewee, who had underlined the importance of customer thinking also in other parts of the interview, hoped for recognition of the customership. When asked whether customer thinking was still somewhat lacking, the interviewee used as a metaphor the difference between a private and a public hospital: in a private hospital, one was treated like a real customer while in a public hospital as “just a patient”. Another interviewee strongly emphasized the importance of targeting communication. According to this interviewee, those members of a stakeholder group that a certain message concerned should be identified and approached directly instead of merely placing an advertisement in the newspaper or on a notice board, which according to him was “public official style” avoiding of responsibility. Communication means which were personal and more likely to reach the desired receiver – such as e-mail, mail or text-messages – should be prioritized.

“ei tyydytä vaan... vaan siihen, että virka-koneisto on laittanut lehtee ilmoituksen, lukekoon kuka haluaa, vaan se että se on kohdennettu ihan sille asiakkaalle. (we should not content with... the official machinery posting an advertisement in the newspaper, may it be read by whomever wants, but that it is targeted to the customer directly.) (P8)

Finally, a topic mentioned by a single interviewee was related to ALKU-project. Namely, one interviewee was hoping for information, as soon as it was available, about the new organization of the ELY Centre – who would be responsible for what and how things would function.

6.4.3.3 Other Suggestions

Other comments and suggestions that the interviewees presented throughout the interviews dealt with 1) cooperation among different actors 2) cooperation within the environmental administration and 3) application of new environmental permits in 2015.

Cooperation among different actors was related to the comments of four interviewees. For example, the administrative culture was criticized for a lack of interaction between different administrative sectors by one interviewee. According to this interviewee, the underlying “power games”

hindered discussion, consulting each other as well as efficient coordination of roles and tasks. Two interviewees, on the other hand, spoke about widening of the cooperation wondering if some of the tasks of the Environment Centre could be delegated to the local level by training non-governmental organizations or municipalities. Another interviewee hoped that different strategies and plans that were developed by different regional actors would be combined and brought together into common agendas. According to this interviewee, cooperation between different actors was still in its infancy. Regional authorities cooperating was one sign of change in this respect.

"siis opetteluahan nää vielä on nää asiat, että... jopa lähempänäki toisiaa olevat intressitahot ni vielä on, tahtoo olla niinku, että pysytään siellä omien seinien sisällä eikä paljo sivuille vilkuilla, että... mutta että kyllä täs on kehitystä tapahtumassa, ja siihen suuntaan ollaan nyt tosiaan menossa että, että ainaki aluehallintoviraomaset tosiaan niinku, pyrkivät löytämään toisensa ja tekemään yhteistyötä." (we are still learning these things... even interest parties, who are closer to each other, are still, it tends to be that they keep within their own walls without looking over their shoulders... but yes some progress is taking place, and that direction we are indeed going that at least regional authorities are trying to find each other and cooperate.) (P5)

Cooperation within the environmental administration was mentioned by two interviewees. One of them considered it a challenge for their organization that the practices between different environment centres varied a lot. In particular, more congruence was needed in the field of waste management where the practices and procedures were particularly divergent. According to this interviewee, cooperation with Central Finland Regional Environment Centre worked well and could serve as an example for other environment centres. Related was the perspective of another interviewee who felt there was no common operative culture among the different environment centres. For example, the same request for comments sent to all the centres produced very different kinds of answers, showing that cooperation and exchange of ideas between them was limited. More systematic cooperation to learn from each other and to further develop their activities was suggested by both interviewees. To compare best practices and to find common ways for dealing with issues related to different subjects one of the interviewees proposed "a development day" among different environment centres and relevant actors from one industry or a sector at a time.

"kokoontuisivat kertaalleen, miettivät niinku päivän näitä toimintatapoja, muotoja, miten toimitaan tällä hetkellä, miten toimitaan kun on poikkeustilanne, miten toimitaan kun on luvitustilanne, miten toimitaan kun on, niinku tämmösiä caseja käydä läpi, hyviä ja huonoja" (they would meet once and think during one day about practices, forms, how they act this moment, how they act in the case of an emergency, how they act when, this type of cases to go through, good and bad) (P2)

Finally, one interviewee gave feedback regarding the application of new environmental permits in their sector in 2015. The interviewee hoped that

resources would be sufficient to handle them in due time. Moreover, the interviewee felt the process could be improved in a sense that the application year would not be same for all applicants – an issue that the Ministry of the Environment should take care of. In addition, the interviewee stressed the importance of having a project group and relevant contact persons for the preparation of the new permit application named by 2013.

6.5 Summary of the Results

To answer the first research question, the main stakeholders of the Environment Centre, according to the results of the preliminary study, belong to ten groups including 269 stakeholder organizations and contacts specified by name as well as 46 generic contacts, such as certain departments within organizations. With regard to the second research question, perceptions about communication, the most mentioned communication preferences were openness and up-to-date communication, followed by knowing people, interactivity, targeting of communication and proper quantity of communication. Preferred communication means and forms consisted of both direct and indirect means and forms. The most mentioned in the former category were personal contacts and meetings. The most mentioned indirect means, on the other hand, was e-mail. Information needs that the interviewees most commonly had included land use and building, nature conservation, research and development, and legislation. Experiences the interviewees had had when dealing with the Environment Centre were mainly mixed, followed by positive and neutral experiences, including some more positive than negative examples. Both positive and negative experiences most commonly dealt with partnership as well as communication and interaction.

With regard to the third research question, perceptions about the relationship, the relationship was described in mainly neutral terms, followed by mixed assessments. Neutral assessments included perceiving the relationship as, for example, factual/formal and distant/sparse, and mixed assessments covered comments, such as promising and emergent. Purpose of the relationship was most commonly connected with complying with law, followed by balancing of industrial activities. With regard to mutual control, half of the interviewees felt positive both about stakeholders' views being considered and their organizations having chances to influence. However, mixed assessments followed the slight majority of positive responses. Positive examples included, for example, listening to the local points of views and openness from the side of the Environment Centre towards new ideas. Mixed answers were related to, for example, disagreements in the past and unwillingness to discuss.

Related to trust, on the other hand, first integrity, treatment being fair and just, included comments that were divided between positive and neutral. Positive comments covered, for example, sparring and developing cooperation. Second, dependability, trusting the Environment Centre kept its promises, received mainly positive comments including examples, such as getting desired information and an expert statement when needed. The two dimensions of competence, on the contrary, were estimated in clearly mixed terms. For example, the achievement of goals depended on the resources granted by the state, and the use of information was sometimes limited by bad accessibility. With regard to commitment, the majority of the interviewees felt the Environment Centre wanted to commit to a long-term relationship with their organization. Examples included regularity of cooperation and chances for participation. In terms of satisfaction with the relationship, half of the interviewees were quite satisfied, the most common school grade being "good", 8. The type of relationship, communal vs. exchange, produced somewhat mixed results. While three interviewees perceived the relationship as communal under certain limitations, two others perceived it as an exchange relationship and two others as neither one, communal nor exchange. Perceptions about changes in the relationship were divided between two opposite views: three interviewees regarded the relationship as changing and while other three considered it unchanging. Moreover, also openness to change was perceived in mainly mixed terms. Nevertheless, many interviewees felt the relationship should or hoped it would allow changes.

Finally, the last research question dealt with suggestions for the new state authority. With regard to how the relationship was perceived in the ELY Centre, the answers were divided between neutral and positive: the former seeing no big changes coming and the latter perceiving the reform as a positive chance. Hopes and opportunities that the interviewees associated with the new authority dealt with widening of the perspective and cooperation as well as benefits related to synergy. Differences in communication and relationship between the main partners of the new state authority were most commonly associated with interaction. Examples given dealt with, for example, formality of interaction and activeness in keeping contacts. With regard to suggestions for the communication of the new state authority, the most commonly mentioned communication means and forms to be developed in the ELY Centre were personal contacts. Proposed alterations related to communication and relationship, on the other hand, mainly dealt with interaction – for example, media contacts and service as well as openness in terms of discussing problematic issues. Other suggestions that emerged dealt with cooperation among different actors and cooperation within the environmental administration.

The figures 5, 6 and 7 summarize the main findings of this study related to the main research questions. Themes that received many mixed comments, that is both positive and negative examples related to certain aspects of the communication and relationship, are highlighted. They include areas of stakeholder communication and relations that the interviewed stakeholders presented also some critical comments about and, thus, need special attention. Moreover, suggestions that the stakeholders presented for the communication and the relationship in the new state authority, highlighted as well, also need consideration and well conclude some of the main points for further development. The main findings related to the research questions of the main study are further discussed in the light of relevant theory in the Conclusions chapter.

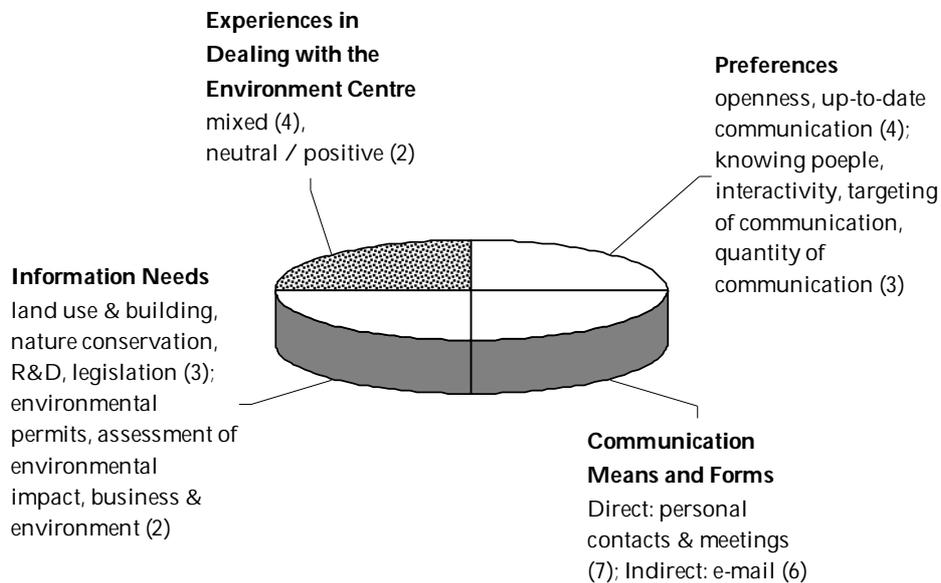


FIGURE 5 Main Findings Related to Communication

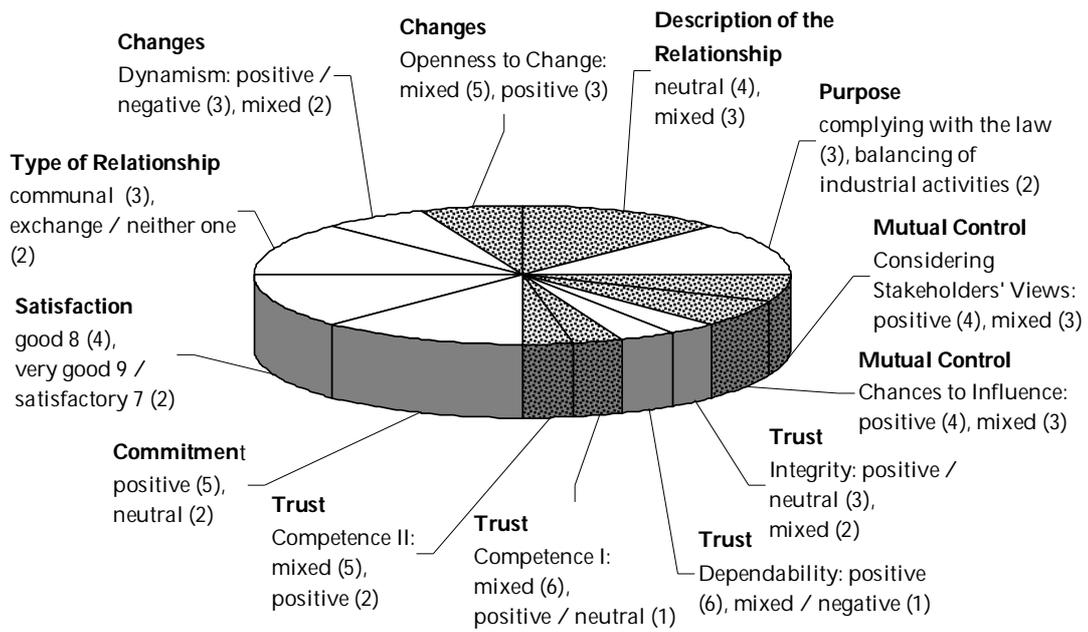


FIGURE 6 Main Findings Related to the Relationship

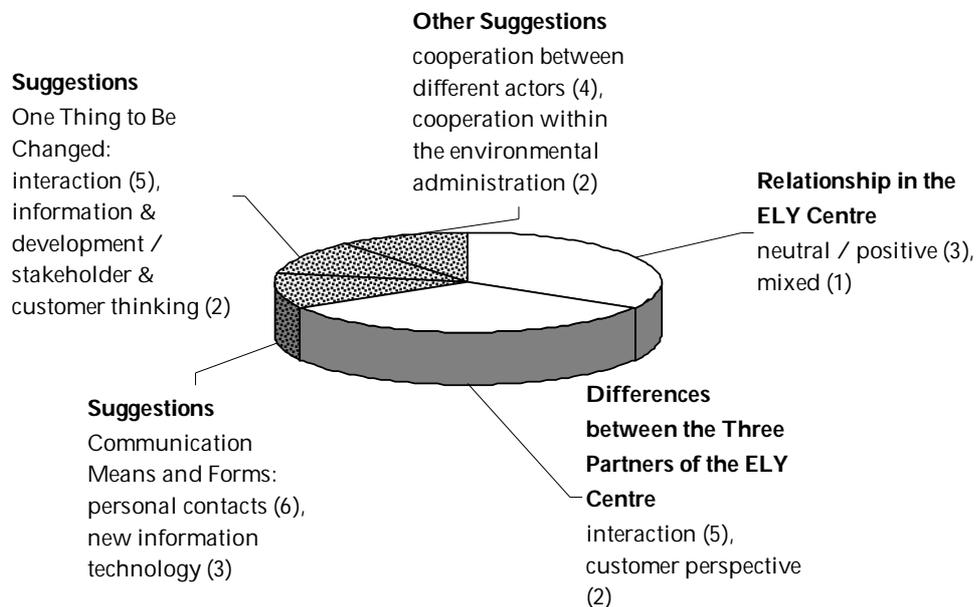


FIGURE 7 Main Findings Related to the New State Authority

7 CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study was to better understand communication and relationships between public sector organizations and their stakeholders. This was pursued through reviewing relevant literature, related to public sector organizations, stakeholder thinking and public relations literature from a relational perspective, and by conducting a qualitative case study, focused on the communication and stakeholder relations of the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre. The objectives of the empirical part were two-fold, including two distinct phases: one, mapping the stakeholders of the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre to identify the main groups and, two, to interview them to clarify stakeholders' perceptions about their communication and relationships with the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre, as well as to receive suggestions for the communication and the relationship in the new state authority. To meet these objectives four research questions were formed.

The first research question was answered through a preliminary study, which consisted of mapping stakeholders by collecting stakeholder data from various documents of the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre and bringing them together in an overview. The other three research questions were answered by the main study, which covered eight semi-structured interviews with representatives of organizations belonging to eight groups of main stakeholders of the Environment Centre. The data gathered were analyzed by the means of a qualitative content analysis using both deductive and inductive approaches.

This chapter is dedicated to the conclusions of this study. Moreover, the central findings of this study are discussed in the light of some previous studies and relevant theory. Finally, an evaluation of the present study as well as some suggestions for future research are presented.

7.1 Discussion and Conclusions

The research questions related to the main part of this study, which were three, dealt with perceptions about the communication and the relationship as well as suggestions for the communication and the relationship in the new state authority. The following discussion is organized accordingly. Findings of the preliminary study, related to the first research question, were presented in chapter 5.2 and are not further discussed.

7.1.1 Perceptions about Communication

The second research question was: "How do the stakeholders perceive the communication of the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre?"

Issues and aspects of communication that the interviewed stakeholders appreciated are in line with the recommendations of governmental communication as well as with several other strategy papers relevant for the communication of the Environment Centre. According to the results, the interviewed stakeholders appreciate most openness and up-to-date communication. The need for quick and up-to-date communication came up also in the study of Turunen and Lavento (2008, 18). Timeliness is also mentioned as one of the principles that should guide communication in the environmental administration (Ympäristöministeriö 2006, 5). Also in the recommendations on the governmental communication by the Prime Minister's Office (Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2002, 14) it is stated that governmental communication should be well-timed and sufficiently fast – thanks to modern, information technology, real-time communication is possible. Likewise, openness is mentioned as one of the goals and guiding principles of governmental communication (Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2002, 11), specified in the communication strategy of the environmental administration as well (Ympäristöministeriö 2006, 5). The comments of two interviewees related to openness in terms of talking through problems and providing information about matters that are of a more sensitive nature being insufficient suggest that openness can still be enhanced in the relationship between the Environment Centre and some of its stakeholders.

Other communication preferences that received many mentions from the interviewees included interactivity and targeting of communication. Interactivity is emphasized also in the recommendations of governmental communication. For example, the principle of democracy, requiring participation of citizens, can be realized only through interactive communication (Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2002, 6). In addition, interactivity involves participation of other stakeholders as well (Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2002, 13). Among other things, interactivity includes collecting feedback, as

mentioned also by the interviewees. Moreover, chances for participation, also when things are still under preparation, should be granted. One of the interviewees hoped for some more activity from the Environment Centre in this respect. Interactivity is reflected also in the way communication in the Finnish public sector is defined – consisting of all those situations that include receiving, producing and sharing of information in interaction with different stakeholders to create meanings about matters that involve society. Communication in this sense expands governmental communication beyond the simple act of informing. (Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2002, 9.) Moreover, the ideal of two-way, interactive communication is common also in the public relations literature (Grunig & Grunig 1992) and associated with stakeholder theory too (Lehtonen 1998, 138). In fact, also the interviewees described interactivity as a two-way process, in contrast to one-way providing of information typical of bigger informative meetings which were consequently criticized.

Moreover, proactivity appeared as a topic appreciated by the interviewed stakeholders. Proactivity is mentioned also in the communication strategy of the environmental administration with regard to identifying stakeholders and their communication needs as early as possible (Ympäristöministeriö 2006, 5). The opinion of one interviewee who emphasized the importance of proactivity and felt it did not currently actualize sufficiently suggests that proactivity can still be better considered by the Environment Centre. The importance of proactivity becomes apparent when considering the task of governmental communication in providing topics for the public debate (Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2001, 42). Moreover, communicating in a proactive way is mentioned also as one of the goals or principles of the communication of the Environment Centre (Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskus 2004, 12). Appropriate planning and organizing of communication can help to enhance proactivity (Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2002, 18).

Communication means and forms should be selected according to what is communicated and to whom. Also in governmental communication, the selection of communication means should be based on the needs of the stakeholders (Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2002, 15). According to the results of this study, most appreciated communication means and forms that the interviewed stakeholders prefer to keep in contact with the Environment Centre are personal contacts and meetings. This was seen also in the communication preferences as knowing people was an aspect of communication much appreciated by the interviewees. It raises the question whether the impersonal, fact-based relationship, which often characterizes the relations of Finnish public sector organizations with their stakeholders (Luoma-aho 2005, 299), is what the stakeholders prefer. When taking into account that personal contacts came first with regard to communication means and forms to be developed in the new state authority too, their

importance in the perspective of the interviewed stakeholders becomes evident. In fact, it is recognized also in the communication theory literature that personal contacts are among the most influential communication means. Due to the limited resources each organization has at its disposal and public sector organizations in particular, personal contacts cannot be maintained with all stakeholders. However, in the case of dealing with the most important stakeholders, as the interviewees of this study, direct communication and personal contacts are worthy of investment. (Juholin 2006, 211.)

E-mail came second as the most preferred communication means after personal contacts. Surprisingly, Internet did not receive many mentions from the interviewees unlike in the study of Turunen and Lavento (2008, 18) where it appeared as the most preferred way of keeping in contact with the different agencies and departments in the environmental administration. A few interviewees mentioned an electronic newsletter which came up also in the study of Turunen and Lavento (2008, 21) and was consequently suggested as a communication means to be developed in the environmental administration. Moreover, a couple of interviewees mentioned training from the side of the Environment Centre as a means of communication that could be more used in the relationship between the Environment Centre and its stakeholders. The possibility of offering more counselling, guidance and consulting, for the municipalities as well as in general for other stakeholders too, appeared also in the study of Kiiskinen (2001, 153) when analysing experiences of stakeholders in dealing with the Environment Centre in terms of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This could be a new way to promote cooperation among the Environment Centre and its stakeholders. Organizing training for new municipal councils, i.e., the decision makers in the Central Finland region, as was proposed by one interviewee, would be an influential way of working towards the vision of the Environment Centre – Central Finland as a region where actions are environmentally responsible (Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskus 2004, 8).

Perceptions about communication can be estimated also in the light of experiences that the interviewed stakeholders had in dealing with the Environment Centre. Half of the interviewees had mixed experiences while the other half had either positive or neutral experiences. In other words, the interviewed stakeholders seem to be divided into two camps, one that is fairly neutral or positive and another that is more critical with some negative experiences too in dealing with the Environment Centre. In the perspective of those, whose experiences were either positive or neutral, communication consisted of keeping one another informed, getting quick answers, open and good conversation and listening to opinions. These are all characteristics of two-way interactive communication (Grunig & White 1992). Moreover, good

cooperation, partnership and relations of trust were combined with expertise from the side of the Environment Centre.

Mixed experiences that consisted of both positive and negative examples also need consideration. As suggested by the stakeholder theory, organizations must take care that their operations are in line with the expectations of their stakeholders in a way that in the long run stakeholders remain satisfied (Näsi 1995, 24). That is why critical voices need to be listened to. For example, one critical comment was that problematic points were not discussed. An unclear division of roles had disturbed the relationship with one stakeholder organization already for some time. Talking through problematic points is related to dealing with difficult things and how communication should not focus only on positive things (Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2002, 14). Moreover, the communication of the Environment Centre was cast a shadow over by some negative publicity related to, for example, communication of certain nature conservation projects, such as Natura 2000. Communication related to Natura 2000 received critical comments also in the study of Kiiskinen (2001). This shows how images and impressions can be of a very enduring nature. In fact, it can be explained by the perceptual process. Because of schemata, sets of individual knowledge structures that each individual has, some impressions are difficult to change (Toskala 2002, 159; Vos & Schoemaker 2006, 27). This of course further stresses the importance of communication – an unmanaged or unhandled issue that causes negative publicity can mark the image of an organization for years to come.

Another point worth noticing is that according to one interviewee, the general communication was fine but related to certain subject matters it did not work at all. Related to this was the comment of another interviewee who felt that the bad experiences he had in the past were because of some people. In fact, also previous research confirms that relations and the reputation of the Environment Centre are to a large extent personified by those officials that the stakeholders themselves mostly deal with – with some the cooperation is more fluent, with others less (Kiiskinen 2001, 143; Määttänen 2004, 101). This of course emphasizes the individual role of each official in the communication process. As the responsibility of communication in a public sector organization belongs to every official (Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2002, 7, 19), studying and further developing communication necessarily involves the whole organization, not only the communications function. This is especially true when due to a lack of resources there might be only one or two professionals full-time in charge of communication, as in the case of the Environment Centre. Consequently, internal cooperation, including relevant communications training, between communication officers and officials in charge of various topics becomes crucial (Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2001, 45–46). The question, however, rises: how can one single professional be able to, not only successfully execute his or her own task in implementing day-to-

day communication activities but, also, provide communications assistance to a personnel of an entire organization in which the communication competence varies a lot? One could question if evaluation and further development of communication makes sense in the public sector if resources are this limited. Indeed, the lack of resources is named as one of the threats posed by the operative environment of the Environment Centre (Kiiskinen 2001, 153; Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskus 2004, 5). As the working group report on governmental communication points out, in addition to the communication officer, the head of each unit or department has to take care that the overall vision or perspective of communication is realized (Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2001, 46).

Finally, also indirect experiences play a role in the perceptions of the interviewed stakeholders about the communication of the Environment Centre. One interviewee, whose relationship with the Environment Centre was still quite young, emphasized indirect experiences despite the otherwise positive experiences. Strong expressions, such as authoritative attitude, lack of discussion and aggressive approach, were used to describe the communication of the Environment Centre. This could in part reflect the image of a police authority that the environmental administration according to Kiiskinen (2001, 128) formerly had. Indirect experience is one of the factors that can influence the perceptual process. It could be based, for example, on public opinion, rumours, media publicity or other second-hand knowledge (Vos & Schoemaker 2006, 24; Vuokko 2004, 200). With regard to distortion via mass media, building personal contacts with the media and providing them with sufficient information in a proactive way is needed. In other instances, interviewees referred to the environmental administration in general when describing the communication of the Environment Centre. This shows that images and perceptions consist of layers (Vuokko 2004, 200) where in the case of the Environment Centre the image is influenced by the actions of, for example, the rest of the environmental administration, other actors in the governmental sector or third-sector environmental organizations.

7.1.2 Perceptions about the Relationship

The third research question was: "How do the stakeholders perceive their relationship with the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre?"

The interviewed stakeholders described their relationship with the Environment Centre in mainly neutral terms. This is in line with previous research according to which neutrality is a condition that dominates relationships between public sector organizations and their frequent stakeholders (Luoma-aho 2005, 297). The neutral tone was reflected also in the way the interviewees perceived the purpose of their relationship as many

of them associated it with complying with the law. In fact, one of the elements or characteristics of the public sector, further differentiating it from the private sector, are legal constraints (Gelders et al. 2007; Liu & Horsley 2007). However, the relationship being neutral is nevertheless not necessarily always an ideal situation as some comments of the interviewees revealed. For example, one interviewee who perceived the relationship as formal and routine-like, the purpose of it being connected to complying with the law, mentioned they did not know in their organization whether the relationship could be developed in some way.

Surprisingly many interviewees estimated the relationship also in mixed terms, i.e., the neutral assessments were followed by mixed perspectives. One such perspective included perceiving the relationship as bureaucratic. It was neither helpful nor proactive, and things were evaluated only reactively. Moreover, one interviewee felt the relationship varied according to subjects and people that he used to deal with to an extent that the relationship as a whole was difficult to estimate. This is a point for which stakeholder theory has been criticized too, for being organization-centred (Fassin 2008). Placing the organization at the centre of attention gives an impression that stakeholders have relations with the organization although in practice they often deal with different employees of the organization (Vos & Schoemaker 2005, 47). Studying stakeholder relations of an entire organization on a general level could thus be criticized for not considering the multiple actors by whom these relations in everyday practice are maintained and conducted. Indeed, also Freeman (1984, 227), who is considered the father of stakeholder theory, suggested that different units or departments of an organization could have their own, more specific, stakeholder "maps" when implementing stakeholder relations. Consequently, in the case of the Environment Centre, the different units could each have one stakeholder map of their own with the personnel of that unit in the middle and the most relevant groups they deal with in a circle around it. Also tracing back the roots of problems could be easier if instead of associating them with the entire organization, the actual unit or function was pointed out.

Many interviewees also felt that the Environment Centre took into consideration stakeholders' views. Moreover, many felt they had chances to influence the actions of the Environment Centre which in turn had influence on them. These two aspects of mutual control describe to what extent the parties in a relationship are satisfied with how much control they have over the relationship (Grunig 2002, 2). Many of the answers being positive, it can be said that many of the interviewed stakeholders seem to be satisfied with the control they have over the relationship with the Environment Centre. In fact, as theory suggests, some control mutuality is needed for the relationship to remain positive and stable (Grunig & Huang 2000, 44).

However, also here mixed perspectives, both with regard to considering stakeholder views as well as chances to influence, followed the slight majority of positive responses. With regard to chances for influencing, the comment of one interviewee, who had most conflicting experiences and feelings towards the Environment Centre of all the interviewees, well describes the need for mutual control. According to this interviewee, various problematic points between their organization and the Environment Centre were marked by the feeling of no chance to influence and no interest in discussing such matters by the Environment Centre. Moreover, the relationship lacked interactivity, and the communication consisted of speaking past one another. Indeed, mutual control reflects also the unavoidable asymmetry of power in an organization–public relationship (Grunig & Huang 2000, 42). Consequently, more symmetrical, two-way communication, based on a dialogue to manage conflict and to enhance mutual understanding (Grunig & White 1992, 39), could be suggested to improve the relationship with this organization, and those in need of more control in the relationship in general. As one interviewee well pointed out, interaction or tackling of problems does not necessarily mean approving or agreeing with the demands of the other party, but rather, openly bringing opposite perspectives and motives onto the table. In some cases, disagreement can be reasonable and justified. Nevertheless, addressing things as they are can improve the relationship despite the sometimes-conflicting interests.

Moreover, with regard to mutual control, two interviewees mentioned they had had some negative experiences in the past but that things had improved. It could be that the increasing demand for interactivity reflected in recent publications on governmental communication (Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2001, Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2002) in Finland has in part contributed to a more two-way approach in the relationships between stakeholders and public sector organizations. However, the same interviewees also suggested that mutual control was somewhat challenged by the nature of public sector activities. Namely, one of them pointed out that acting according to laws and regulations naturally produced a taste of bureaucracy in the relationship. Another felt that related to tasks that were defined in the law, the Environment Centre had its sovereignty and should not even be influenced. This type of duality of perspectives, need for interactivity vs. more straightforward taking care of its tasks, could in part reflect the two different dimensions of public sector activities: legislation and execution (Nieminen 2000, 117). On one hand, there is legislation, which in a democratic society belongs to all citizens and should consequently aim at creating mutual understanding as well as equal chances for participation and discussion for all members of society. Execution, on the other hand, involves efficiently putting into practice decisions that are made as a result of legislative processes. While the former should be based on interactivity, referred to also

as communicative action, the latter is more goal-oriented involving attempts to influence others with the purpose of achieving the desired goals, referred to as strategic action (Nieminen 2000, 109–110 on the basis of Habermas 1984).

As Nieminen points out, the challenge is to differentiate between communication that serves legislation and communication that serves execution. Although two-way communication and interactivity can be regarded as ideals of managing relations between a public sector organization and its stakeholders to guarantee the principle of democracy, the choice of strategies should always reflect the wisdom of “carpe diem – seize the day”, what is appropriate for each situation and case, as proposed also by van Ruler (2004). In the case of a stakeholder with some unsolved issues troubling him or her and the relationship, there is no other way but to sit down and talk through the problems following the principle of interactivity. This is especially true when the stakeholder belongs to the group of key stakeholders, also called definitive stakeholders, possessing power, urgency, legitimacy (Mitchell et al. 1997) and a frequent contact (Luoma-aho 2005). Moreover, any urgent, unfulfilled needs among a group of stakeholders is critical for an organization as urgent publics with urgent causes are those that often attract the attention of media (Rawlins 2006, 6) in a way that small brooks easily turn into rivers. On the basis of this study, it seems that one field in which the stakeholders may have some urgent and unfulfilled needs includes, for example, land owners, farmers and entrepreneurs. Similar conclusions can be made based on Kiiskinen’s findings (2001, 143–145, 226) according to which the reputation of the Environment Centre was more debatable among certain stakeholder groups.

Related to the different dimensions of trust, the perceptions of the relationship were divided into two. While integrity was perceived in mainly positive and neutral terms and dependability in clearly positive terms, the two aspects of competence received clearly mixed responses. When taking a more careful look at the different dimensions through which trust in this study was examined – integrity, dependability and competence – dependability, synonymous with trustworthiness, is maybe the most straightforward indicator of trust. The findings related to the first two dimensions of trust, dependability and integrity, are in line with the results of previous studies according to which the Finnish public sector organizations enjoy high levels of trust by their frequent stakeholders despite the otherwise neutral reputation (Luoma-aho 2005). However, with regard to the competence dimension of trust, including goal achievement and quality of the information, the results were clearly mixed indicating a point, which seems to be most controversial in the relationship between the interviewed stakeholders and the Environment Centre. For example, two interviewees felt the achievement of goals depended on the resources the Environment

Centre was granted by the state. Indeed, one of the changes or developments that the public sector has been going through over the past decades includes the growing demand for efficiency and efficacy in the face of increasingly scarce resources (Osborne & Brown 2005). As a result, managerial models, referred to also as the New Public Management, have challenged the traditional public administration.

With regard to commitment, many of the interviewed stakeholders felt the Environment Centre wanted to maintain a long-term relationship with them. In other words, there seems to be a feeling among the interviewed stakeholders that the relationship is worth spending energy on to maintain and promote. According to Grunig and Huang (2000, 46), commitment has two aspects that are relevant for an organization–public relationship: affective commitment and continuance commitment. The majority of the answers seemed to reflect the latter category where the focus is on committing to continue a certain line of action without emotional or affective undertakings. This is understandable when considering the fact that law defines many of the relationships that public sector organizations have, hence many of the relationships, indeed, do have a long-term perspective by the nature of tasks they are meant to deal with.

Related to commitment, furthermore, the representative of the media felt that the relationship lacked some perseverance and long-term perspective. Knowing people better and building personal contacts was considered a solution to it. In fact, in many points of the interview the representative of the media stressed the importance of personal contacts and hoped for some more activity from the side of the Environment Centre in terms of media relations. The need for more personal contacts by the representatives of the media came up also in the study of Turunen and Levanto (2008, 22). Moreover, these findings are supported also by the study of Vähämaa (2008, 44) who studied impressions of the media on governmental communication and found that the media hoped to have more chances for communication that offers background information. As also the publication of the working group report on governmental communication acknowledges, the media should be provided with information that is more comprehensive as well as offered more background information (Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2001, 46–47).

The type of the relationship the interviewed stakeholders had with the Environment Centre was studied in the light of two concepts that have been used to describe organization–public relationships: exchange relationship and communal relationship (Grunig & Hon 1999). The responses were somewhat mixed, and the dichotomy exchange–communal relationship did not seem to fully match with the responses of the interviewed stakeholders. This could be explained in various ways. First, Hung (2005) has argued that in addition to these two, there are also other types of relationships including,

for example, manipulative, contractual, symbiotic and covenantal relationships. Different types of relationships can also be considered a continuum from exploitative relationships to communal relationships. (Hung 2005, 415–416.) Consequently, it could be that the terms used are inadequate to describe the variety of relationships between the Environment Centre and its stakeholders. According to Hung (2005, 416), for example, between exchange relationship and communal relationship there is a covenantal relationship that involves an exchange of opinions and commitment to a common good without going as far as to considering the interests of the other party as in the communal relationship. The possible inadequacy of the concepts came up also related to the exchange relationship as one of the interviewees regarding the relationship more as an exchange relationship commented that the terms used did not exactly fit the public sector context. This becomes evident when considering the *raison d'être* of public sector organizations in serving the public interest, collective and shared interests of all citizens (Lane 2000), and its tasks related to the provision of basic services and functions of society (Nieminen 2000). Hence secondly, it could also be that the dichotomy exchange–communal relationship does not completely reflect the public sector settings. In fact, one interviewee felt the relationship was neither one, communal nor exchange, but rather an official relationship based on administrative procedures and execution of an environmental permission procedure.

In addition, neither could the response of the representative of the non-governmental organizations be placed in either one of the categories. It could be hypothesized that the answer of this interviewee, describing how it was not sure whether the Environment Centre felt their organization was worth considering due to their few resources and little influence, might reflect the conditions in which many non-governmental organizations operate – even in the case when they are key stakeholders, the relationship is less formal resembling a diffused linkage (Dozier & Ehling 1992). In addition, contradictory responses by the interviewees could reflect also what Hung (2005, 410) found in her study that often different types of relationships exist simultaneously in a way that it can be hard to distinguish one type from another. In fact, one of the interviewees of this study mentioned that the relationship had both aspects, common goals as well as individual objectives, referring to a mixture of relationships, identified by Hung (2005, 404). However, as in Hung's study, also in this study many interviewees considered a communal-relationship-like-scenario, or a win-win situation, described by Hung, an ideal or a necessity, and an aim of the relationship.

With regard to changes, the perceptions of the relationship were divided into two: one considering it changing and another unchanging. This could be explained by what Luoma-aho (2005, 42) refers to as a pull between isomorphism and contingency, stability and change. On one hand, public

sector organizations are traditionally perceived as big, bureaucratic and constrained by laws and regulations (Vuokko 2004, 101) and, thus, slow to change. On the other hand, they are surrounded by a complicated and unstable environment as the course of their destiny is defined by political actions and relationships, lead by a complex network of actors (Gelder et al. 2007, 329; Liu & Horsley 2007, 378) with multiple, differing and sometimes also conflicting goals, principles and agendas. Concerning openness to change, responses were somewhat mixed. Nevertheless, there seems to be a favourable attitude towards changes among many of the interviewed stakeholders: apart from one interviewee who considered changelessness a positive thing, a signal of trust and stability, changes were mostly regarded as progress, readiness to look at things from new perspectives and moving ahead. This could be seen also in the mainly positive or neutral perceptions that the interviewees had about the relationship in the new state authority.

The associations related to the changes and how well the organizations welcome them can be interpreted in the light of a systems theoretical perspective on organizations. According to the systems theory, in order to survive, organizations need to interact with and adapt to the constantly changing environment around them (Miller 2006, 71; Kreps 1990, 94). Open systems are those that allow changes and influences to permeate their boundaries while closed systems are enclosed within themselves (Vos & Schoemaker 2005, 157). According to the old or traditional model of public administration, public agencies are bureaucracies that allow only a limited outside influence, thus they are more closed as systems (Denhardt & Denhardt 2000). The recent trends and demands for openness, accessibility, interactivity, and customer, stakeholder or receiver orientation (Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2002; Denhardt & Denhardt 2000; Vuokko 2004) refer to a development that public sector organizations are becoming, and are required to do so, more open as systems. However, despite these new trends, described to replace the old, more traditional patterns of public administration do still exist (Luoma-aho 2005, 55). Maybe the answers of the stakeholders being somewhat mixed and confused reflect also the current situation where the old and new meet, interact and join creating something that is a mixture of both.

With regard to the future of the relationship with the Environment Centre in the new state authority, most interviewed stakeholders associated it with hopes and opportunities. A favourable attitude from the side of the key stakeholders is of course a good platform for the Environment Centre to enter the new authority and continue cultivating relations with its main partners. Hopes and opportunities serve also as a good basis for change communication in the new authority. Nevertheless, the few worries and challenges, which were presented, are good to take into consideration too. They could represent weak signals which, although in minority in this study,

could occupy the minds of some other stakeholders – including an increased bureaucracy and obscurity and the consequent weakening of the relationship, domination of economy over the environment and contradictions in the internal organization of the new authority.

To conclude the discussion about the third research question, perceptions about the relationship, many of the interviewed stakeholders seem to be quite satisfied with their relationship with the Environment Centre, which was considered to equal a grade 8 in the Finnish school system. Two other interviewees gave a 7, and other two a 9. According to Grunig and Huang (2000, 45), satisfaction might be the most significant indicator of success in maintaining a positive relationship and it reflects the belief from both parties that the other is willing to invest in positive measures to keep up and look after the relationship. In this respect, the findings of this study match with Luoma-aho's (2005, 288–290) conclusions about the neutral reputation of public sector organizations in Finland, as also in her study, the majority of stakeholders assessed the target organizations with school grades 7 and 8. Nevertheless, it is good to bear in mind the many mixed responses, suggestions for improvement and critical comments that were given. As one of the interviewees, who gave a 7, said, the grade could rise, depending on the results that would be achieved, or, equally, fall too. In fact, despite the somewhat neutral or quite good overall school grades given, critical voices among the interviewees were many too. When clustered into four groups, praisers, neutrals, contented and critics, as done in Luoma-aho (2005, 260–261), on the basis of their positive, negative, neutral and mixed responses, related to experiences in dealing with the Environment Centre, perceptions of the different aspects of the relationship as well as school grades given, critics are in majority consisting of four interviewees. Two interviewees could be called contented, one a praiser and one a neutral.

The relatively big number of critics might have been influenced by the fact that many of the interviewees by coincidence had a business- and industry-oriented background. Another explanation could be that stakeholders are said to have become more demanding (Näsi 1995; Lehtonen 2002; Luoma-aho 2008). Perhaps the once sovereign public sector organizations, alone in control (Denhardt & Denhardt 2000), occupying a monopoly in their own domain (Nieminen 2000), can no longer take the support of the stakeholders for granted. Being just one player in the field, the focus should move in the words of Denhardt & Denhardt (2000, 553) from controlling towards agenda setting, facilitating discussion, negotiating and brokering solutions to public problems – from steering towards serving, and from informing towards communicating (Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2002, 9). Therefore, despite the overall good or average estimation of the relationship, the suggestions for improvement and critical comments should be taken into consideration too. These represent the so-called weak signals which should be considered a

forewarning. When taken into consideration in a proactive way, they can serve as a platform for further learning and improving.

7.1.3 Suggestions for the Communication and the Relationship

The fourth research question was: "What suggestions do the stakeholders have for the communication and the relationship in the new state authority?"

With regard to communication means and forms to be developed in the new state authority, personal contacts emerged as clearly most important in the perspective of the interviewees. When taking into consideration that personal contacts and meetings were also most preferred means for keeping contacts with the Environment Centre, the message is clear – in the opinion of the interviewed stakeholders, personal contacts as most influential communication means cannot be replaced by, for example, electronic communication. This is good to keep in mind in the era of increasing technology-mediated communication. Traditional electronic communication means as well as new information technology were mentioned after personal contacts. For example, web pages were considered useful for accessing materials and other relevant information. They could be improved by including a frequently asked questions and answers page. New information technology, such as Internet portals and video conferences, on the other hand, were appreciated for enabling interaction and discussion for which e-mail, for example, is not suitable. However, any new solution requires careful piloting by a group of test users. Finally, based on the comments of many interviewees, the adoption of an electronic newsletter can be recommended.

In addition, communication through mass media was mentioned by some interviewees as a communication means to be further developed in the new state authority. The wish for more media publicity could reflect the findings of Kiiskinen (2001, 147–148) according to which the environment centres and environmental administration in general were perceived as unknown and invisible. Reading about the Environment Centre in the newspaper could contribute to creating an open and public profile for it. Taken the central role of the media in the public debate (Vos & Schoemaker 2005, 68), the concern of the stakeholders for the visibility of the Environment Centre in the media is of course not without importance. Moreover, it further stresses the importance of media relations. One way the Environment Centre could increase the awareness of the stakeholders on its media coverage, could be to make a summary of the media follow up in its web pages.

Issues and aspects that the interviewed stakeholders wanted to change in the communication or relationship will conclude some of the main points for further improvement and development. For the representative of the media

it was important to know who communicates and about what in the Environment Centre. Based on this and what has been discussed earlier, it would be good for the Environment Centre to further develop its media relations. For example, the Environment Centre could present itself to the representatives of the media by visiting a meeting of a journalist association, organize personal briefings and discussions with the media as well as offer more background information, as suggested. All in all, to increase the awareness of the stakeholders about communication responsibilities and tasks, relevant contact persons could be outlined also in the web pages, including information about whom to contact in different subject matters.

The relationship of some stakeholders with the Environment Centre was marked by unsolved problematic points. Consequently, as discussed earlier, a more symmetrical, two-way communication, based on dialogue to manage conflict, increase openness and to enhance mutual understanding (Grunig & White 1992, 39) could be suggested to tackle these issues. Moreover, possibly problematic substance issues should be acknowledged by the management and communication professionals as they may influence the reputation of the entire organization. In addition, there was a hope for a more negotiating and proactive working culture, based on a willingness for cooperation. This suggestion reflects the findings of Kiiskinen (2001) according to which the stakeholders hoped the role of the Environment Centre would shift from one who controls to one who provides service and counselling.

Moreover, another area of proposed alterations covered customer thinking. One interviewee, for example, felt customer thinking was still lacking. Consequently, a more customer-oriented approach was suggested. In the terms of this study, customer thinking equals stakeholder thinking. With regard to the new state authority, for example, customers' needs and expectations should be considered right from the beginning. In addition, stakeholders hoped for better targeting of communication, including the need to carefully identify stakeholders to whom a certain message is directed. Targeting of communication, based on identifying the needs of stakeholders, is also mentioned as an area of development in the communications strategy of the environmental administration (Ympäristöministeriö 2006, 6). Moreover, with regard to information and development, a better accessibility to and usability of research, studies and other information produced by the Environment Centre is needed according to some of the interviewed stakeholders. As the development of publications and reports came up also in the study of Turunen & Lavento (2008, 23), it is worth considering. In case the idea of a regular electronic newsletter is adopted, stakeholders could be directly informed about different studies, projects and their results. The relationship should not be left without care either but maintained and looked after. Namely, one interviewee hoped for a

more goal-oriented focus in the relationship including planning of interaction, prioritizing of issues and outlining of long-term objectives.

Finally, another area of suggestions and comments that emerged in this study covers cooperation among different actors and cooperation within the environmental administration. For example, the administrative culture was criticized for a lack of interaction between the different administrative sectors, and an inadequate cooperation in the environmental administration, between the environment centres for example, was considered to hinder its effective functioning.

The need for more cooperation and increased interaction between various actors was identified also by Kiiskinen (2001, 153). In fact, recently it has been proposed that studying stakeholders should not be only about identifying and categorizing different stakeholders, but an emphasis should be placed on interrelations between various stakeholders, issues and the stakes they hold (Wu 2007; Luoma-aho & Vos 2009; Luoma-aho & Paloviita 2010;). Moreover, stakeholder theory has been criticized for not taking into account stakeholder relations in a wider sense, including networks and multiple linkages between different groups of stakeholders, as the picture with the organization in the centre and stakeholders around misleadingly suggests stakeholders are not connected to each other (Fassin 2008, 883). The many comments related to cooperation between different actors, presented by the interviewees, could point towards this direction – that stakeholder relations are more complex than studying the relationship between one organization and its stakeholders. Moreover, the importance of cooperation is further highlighted in the context of governmental communication where large, social problems and issues require participation of various parties (Vos & Schoemaker 2005, 158). As the working group report on governmental communication points out, communication is all about cooperation (Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2002, 45).

7.2 Evaluation of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research

The quality or trustworthiness of research is often explained in terms of validity and reliability, explained in more detail in chapter 5.5. As discussed earlier, these concepts were first used in the sphere of quantitative research and, thus, do not fully meet the needs of qualitative studies. The idea of an objective reality and a truth which the researcher tries to unfold, included in these concepts, poorly suits the context of qualitative research. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 133–134.) This is also the case in the present study, which was focused on perceptions – subjective views, understandings, interpretations and experiences of the interviewed stakeholders.

The evaluation of qualitative studies, according to Eskola & Suoranta (2008, 210), culminates in the reliability of the whole research process. Structural validity is, thus, central and can be enhanced by explaining the different steps involved in the process and the choices that were made (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 189). With regard to validity of this study, the methodological choices and the course of this study were explained in detail in chapter 5. Moreover, each step of the analysis was described systematically. On the basis of this, the reader should be able to follow the research process and the different steps involved. Furthermore, while analysing the data, the aim was to treat them comprehensively in a way that also deviations were taken into consideration. In addition, tabulation and quantification were used when possible. Different parts of the data were constantly compared and the original transcribed interview texts kept beside during the whole analysis process.

Reliability in qualitative research, on the other hand, can be explained with the quality of the data and their analysis – for example, if all the relevant data have been considered and whether the results reflect the thinking of the interviewees (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 189). With regard to the reliability of data collection in this study, the interview structure was constructed on the basis of some previous studies and literature. In addition, before the actual interviews, one test interview was made to test the appropriateness of the questions and the interview structure. Moreover, all the interviews were recorded. To enhance the reliability of the data analysis, all the recorded interviews were transcribed word-for-word. In addition, the different steps involved in the content analysis were saved in distinct Word-files. Therefore, whenever some unclear points emerged during the analysis, the original part of the answer as well as the different phases of the analysis could be traced back easily. With regard to the reliability of the coding process, it can be regarded as enhanced by the fact that the coding categories were in part based on some previous literature used in the interview structure. Moreover, the results were supported with relevant citations to ensure that the interviewees' voice would be manifested.

No research is perfect and one part of the process is to learn what could be done differently in future studies. As Alasuutari (1995, 249) well points out, the end of one research process is often the beginning for another study. In the same way, this study does not claim to be perfect and covers some limitations. For example, the interview structure of this study was quite long and covered many topics. Combined with many additional questions and the conversation-like approach during the interviews, the interviews became rather long resulting in large data. Transcribing and analyzing them was not only time-consuming but, in addition, a wide theoretical perspective was required. A more limited focus would have enabled a more in-depth approach.

Due to the nature of qualitative research in being concerned with “how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced, produced or constituted” (Mason 2002, 3) and given the central role of the researcher in this process (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, 210), the results of qualitative studies to some extent always reflect the subjective realities of both the researcher and the informants. In the same way, this study has been conducted in a certain context, involving certain people in a particular moment of time, which could not be fully reproduced and repeated. Consequently, also the results probably reflect at least to some extent those unique circumstances in which the study was conducted and are, thus, generalizable only to a limited extent. To add to it, this study was a case study describing stakeholder relations of one organization perceived by a limited number of stakeholders who were interviewed. Nevertheless, in qualitative research, as Alasuutari (1995, 222) reminds, more important than making generalizations, which according to him is a term that should be used only in survey studies, is how well the researcher manages to prove that his or her analysis relates to phenomena beyond the data. In the chapter on discussion and conclusions, the findings of this study were discussed in the light of some previous studies and relevant literature with the aim of connecting them to the broader context and the purpose of this study, i.e., understanding communication and relationships between stakeholders and public sector organizations. Similar findings of some previous studies in part indicate that the results of this study reflect phenomena broader than the perceptions of the interviewed stakeholders.

Another point, which supports the reliability of the findings, is that the interviewees presented also some critical comments. Moreover, the majority of interviewees had several years of experience in cooperating with the Environment Centre. A further limitation, on the contrary, could be that although the interviewees covered the main groups of stakeholders of the Environment Centre, strong conclusions cannot be made on the differences between the groups since only one representative from each stakeholder group was interviewed due to the limited scope of this study. Related to this, it could be questioned whether a quantitative survey would have been a more appropriate method for conducting this study. A qualitative approach was, however, preferred, as the goal was to gain deep, rather than a large amount of insights on the topic. Moreover, as the majority of the existing studies on stakeholders have been quantitative in nature (Luoma-aho 2005; Laplume et al. 2008), the present study sought to give a contribution in offering a qualitative approach on the topic. However, studying relationships and communication focusing on different stakeholder groups would be a good topic for future studies. As discussed earlier, some signs of group differences emerged in the findings of this study. Understanding different needs of different groups of stakeholders in the public sector context would offer

important insights for the planning of communication activities of public sector organizations.

Moreover, the relationship between stakeholders and the case organization covered only the perspective of the stakeholders while the other side of the coin, the perspective of the case organization itself, was not dealt with. However, this would have required a larger study, which was not possible within the limited resources of this study. In fact, this could be a topic for a further study – to move on to coorientational measures of the relationship including perceptions of both parties, predictions about the perceptions of the other party as well as third-party observations (Grunig & Huang 2000, 34, 47). Nevertheless, as Luoma-aho remarks (2005, 296), in the case of public sector organizations, the purpose of which is to serve the citizens (Valtioneuvoston kanslia 2002, 7), stakeholders' perspectives are especially valuable and a good starting point when measuring relationships (Vuokko 2004, 27). In addition, it could be questioned whether this study really measured perceptions or, rather, experiences. In fact, these two things are related, as one element that influences the process of perception is, indeed, experience. Moreover, perceptions and experiences are intertwined to an extent that it is often hard to make out which a person's knowledge is based on (Vos & Schoemaker 2006, 22). In this way, perceptions are part of a comprehensive experience which consists of, and is influenced by, many different elements of a wider processing of information (Toskala 2002, 157).

Finally, the present study can be criticized for being limited to a one-dimensional and dyadic approach of studying stakeholder relations (Wu 2007; Fassin 2008). Focused on the relationship between stakeholders and the Central Finland Regional Environment Centre, nothing is known about the possible interrelations between different stakeholder groups and how those interrelations might in turn influence the relationship. Consequently, another topic for future research could be cooperation between different stakeholders in environmental matters. This would involve studying relationships not only between stakeholders and a public sector organization, as done in this study, but also between various stakeholder groups – including positioning, understanding and predicting often contentious and conflicting relations between them (Wu 2007, 417). This could be done by incorporating a network perspective and examining different stakeholder networks to see how they are formed in the public sector context. In addition, it could be studied whether and how networks can facilitate cooperation between different actors. A theoretical perspective that could be helpful in this respect is the actor-networking stakeholder theory, proposed by Luoma-aho and Paloviita (2010), which combines stakeholder theory with the understanding of both networks as well as developments in the wider organizational environment. Drawing from actor-network theory (ANT), it explains the process of translation through which new individuals and groups may turn

into important stakeholders, stressing the importance of monitoring the organizational environment, identifying issues, stakes and interrelations between various actors. (Luoma-aho & Paloviita 2010, 49–50, 60–61.) The importance of cooperation becomes evident when taking into consideration that environmental matters are often linked to a wider social and economic context both on a national and international level involving collaboration of multiple actors from different sectors and fields (Ympäristöministeriö 2006, 1) with multiple interests and agendas. Needless to say, sustainable development requires a comprehensive perspective.

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APPENDIX

Haastattelurunko

I NYKYISYYS/MENNEISYYS

A) Taustatiedot

Aika ja paikka

Nimi

Organisaatio

Stakeholder-ryhmä

Asema organisaatiossa

Sukupuoli

1. Kuinka kauan olet työskennellyt organisaatiossasi?
 - Kuinka kauan olet ollut työelämässä?
2. Kuinka tuttu Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskus on sinulle?
 - Kuinka kauan olet tehnyt yhteistyötä Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskuksen kanssa?
3. Kuinka usein olet yleensä tekemisissä Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskuksen kanssa?
 - Viikoittain, kuukausittain, vuosittain, harvemmin kuin kerran vuodessa

B) Vuorovaikutus

a) Viestintäarvostukset

4. Mitä seikkoja arvostat organisaatioiden viestintään liittyen yleensä?
 - Nopeaa ja reaaliaikaista, tulee minulle suoraan, on kohdennettua, tarjoaa taustatietoja, antaa mahdollisuuden vuorovaikutukseen, tarjoaa elämyksiä, tietoon voi helposti palata

b) Viestintämuodot ja -välineet

5. Minkä viestintävälineiden ja muotojen kautta haluaisit pitää yhteyttä Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskukseen? Entä miten haluaisit hankkia tietoa Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskuksesta?

- Suorat: henkilökohtainen yhteydenpito ja tapaamiset, pienryhmätillaisuudet ja tapaamiset (neuvottelupäivät, retket, koulutus, informaatiotillaisuudet, taustakeskustelut ja ideointi), paneelit (keskustelutillaisuudet), suuret tilaisuudet ja tapahtumat (seminaarit, messut, näyttelyt), avointen ovien päivät, tiedotustillaisuudet, palveleva puhelin
- Välilliset: Internet ja ekstranet, sähköposti, tiedotteet ja kirjeet, säännöllisesti ilmestyvät sidosryhmäjulkaisut (kuten asiakaslehti, painettu vai verkossa?), esitteet ja julkaisut, mainonta, mediajulkisuus (lehtien erikois- ja teemasivut), audiovisuaaliset tallenteet

c) Tiedontarpeet

6. Minkälaisia tiedontarpeita sinulla tai organisaatiollasi on Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskuksen suuntaan?

- Ympäristönsuojelu (ohjaus ja valvonta/ympäristöluvut), Luonto ja kulttuuriympäristöt (luonnonsuojelu, kulttuuriympäristöt, lajit ja luontotyypit, luonnonhoito ja kunnostus), Yhdyskunnat (maankäyttö: kaavoitus, poikkeamisluvat, vesihuolto/vesivarat: vesivarojen hoito, pohjavedet, hydrologinen seuranta), Ympäristötyöt (rakennuttaminen, ympäristön hoitotyöt, patoturvallisuus, tulva- ja ympäristövahingot), Tutkimus ja kehittäminen (valtakunnallinen kehittäminen, ympäristön tilan seuranta, tutkimus- ja selvitystoiminta)
- Yhdyskuntien ja rakennetun ympäristön laadun parantaminen (kaavoitus, vesihuolto, rakentamisen ohjaus, elinympäristön viihtyisyys, kulttuuriympäristöarvot), Luonnon monimuotoisuus (luonnonsuojeluohjelmat, luontotyypit ja lajit, luonnonsuojelualueet, luonnonsuojelu), Ympäristön suojele (pintavesien laatu, jätesuunnitelma, maaperä ja pohjavedet, ilmansuojele ja meluntorjunta, ympäristövastuullinen kulutus ja tuotanto)

d) Kokemukset

7. Miten kuvailisit asiointikokemuksiasi Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskuksen kanssa?

- Positiivinen, neutraali, negatiivinen

C) Yhteistyösuhde

8. Miten kuvailisit yhteistyösuhdettanne Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskuksen kanssa?

- Sisältää erilaisia suhteita, myös asiakkuussuhteet.

9. Mikä sinusta yhteistyösuhdettenne tarkoitus on?

e) Molemminpuolinen hallinta/vastavuoroisuus

10. Missä määrin sinusta Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskus ottaa huomioon, mitä organisaatiollanne on sanottavanaan? Voitko antaa esimerkkejä siitä, miten Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskus on ottanut organisaationne näkemykset huomioon päätöksissään ja toimissaan tai on jättänyt organisaationne näkemykset huomiotta? Tuntuuko sinusta, että organisaatiollasi on mahdollisuus vaikuttaa niihin Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskuksen toimiin, joilla on vaikutusta toimintaan? Voitko antaa esimerkkejä?

- tai sidosryhmillä yleensä

f) Luottamus

11. Osaatko kuvailla tilanteita, joissa Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskus on kohdellut organisaatiotanne reilusti ja oikeudenmukaisesti tai epäreilusti ja epäoikeudenmukaisesti? (*rehellisyys*)

- tai sidosryhmiä yleensä

12. Voitko kuvailla joitain esimerkkejä, jotka osoittavat, että Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskukseen voi luottaa siinä, että se pitää lupauksensa tai ei pidä lupauksiaan? (*luotettavuus*)

13. Kuinka luottavainen olet sen suhteen, että Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskus pystyy saavuttamaan sen, mitä se sanoo tekevänsä? Voitko antaa esimerkkejä? (*pätevyys*)

14. Kuinka luottavainen olet Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskuksen tuottaman tiedon asiantuntevuuteen? (*asiantuntijuuden luotettavuus*)

g) Sitoutuminen

15. Voitko antaa esimerkkejä, jotka osoittavat, että Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskus haluaa sitoutua pitkäaikaiseen yhteistyösuhteeseen organisaationne kanssa tai ei halua sitoutua pitkäaikaiseen yhteistyöhön?

- tai sidosryhmiensä kanssa yleensä

h) Tyytyväisyys

16. Kuinka tyytyväinen olet yhteistyösuhteeseen Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskuksen kanssa? Voitko selittää, miksi olet tai miksi et ole tyytyväinen?

i) Yhteisöllinen suhde

17. Uskotko, että Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskus on kiinnostunut yhteisten päämäärien saavuttamisesta organisaationne kanssa, vaikka se ei itse suoraan hyötyisikään siitä? Miksi olet sitä mieltä? Entä uskotko, että teidän organisaationne on kiinnostunut yhteistyöstä yhteisten päämäärien saavuttamiseksi Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskuksen kanssa, vaikkei se suoraan hyötyisikään siitä? Voitko antaa esimerkkejä?

j) Vaihtosuhte

18. Uskotko, että Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskus ottaa organisaationne huomioon vain, jotta se voisi paremmin saavuttaa omat tavoitteensa? Voitko antaa esimerkkejä tästä? Entä uskotko, että organisaationne on kiinnostunut yhteistyöstä Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskuksen kanssa vain, jotta se voisi paremmin saavuttaa oman päämääränsä? Voitko antaa jonkun esimerkin, kuinka näin on tapahtunut?

II TULEVAISUUS

D) Muutokset vuorovaikutuksessa ja yhteistyösuhteessa

k) Muutosalttius

19. Onko sinusta yhteistyösuhteenne Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskuksen kanssa muuttuva vai muuttumaton? Voitko antaa esimerkkejä?

20. Tuntuuko sinusta, että yhteistyösuhteenne Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskuksen kanssa sallii uudet vaikutteet ja muutokset vai ei salli uusia vaikutteita ja muutoksia? Voitko antaa esimerkkejä tästä?

l) Elinkeino, liikenne ja ympäristökeskus (ELY)

21. Jos ajattelet vuorovaikutustanne Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskuksen kanssa, eroaako se Keski-Suomen TE-keskuksen ja tiepiirin kanssa käymästänne vuorovaikutuksesta? Voitko antaa esimerkkejä? Entä yhteistyösuhteenne Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskuksen kanssa, eroaako se yhteistyösuhteestanne Keski-Suomen TE-keskuksen ja tiepiirin kanssa? Voitko antaa esimerkkejä?

- Esim. viestintävälineet ja -muodot, vuorovaikutuksen tiheys, asiointikokemukset
- Esim. luotettavuus, vastavuoroisuus, tyytyväisyys, yhteistyö yhteisten päämäärien saavuttamiseksi, reiluus ja oikeudenmukaisuus, pitkäntähtäimen yhteistyö

22. Miten näet yhteistyösuhteenne Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskuksen kanssa tulevassa Elinkeino-, liikenne- ja ympäristökeskuksessa?

m) Kehitysehdotukset (ELY)

23. Mitkä ovat sinusta tärkeimpiä viestintätapoja tai -välineitä, joita tulevassa Elinkeino-, liikenne- ja ympäristökeskuksessa (ELY) tulisi kehittää?

24. Jos voisit muuttaa yhden asian Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskuksen viestinnässä tulevassa Elinkeino-, liikenne- ja ympäristökeskuksessa (ELY), mikä se olisi? Entä jos voisit muuttaa yhden asian yhteistyösuhteessanne, mikä se olisi?

n) Loppukysymys

25. Onko jotain, mitä ei kysytty ja mitä haluaisit vielä mainita joko Keski-Suomen ympäristökeskuksen ja organisaationne väliseen viestintään tai yhteistyösuhteeseen liittyen – nyt tai tulevassa Elinkeino-, liikenne- ja ympäristökeskuksessa?