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# An Agonistic Perspective on the Challenge of Biodiversity Value Integration

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**Abstract:** The identity-laden conflict comprising clashing biodiversity values can hinder the integration of plural biodiversity values into policy. Until now, research on the elicitation and negotiation of biodiversity values approached this task by applying an economic or a deliberative model to guide the elicitation of values and transformation knowledge regarding their negotiation. However, both models have weaknesses in generating robust and transformative outcomes, which lie in their approach to dealing with identity conflicts and their related passions and affects. To address this gap, I explain how research has used both models and discuss how an agonistic model can improve the debate. I will show that current models highlight integrating and synergising values. In contrast, the agonistic model aims at eliciting distinctive values that challenge hegemonic values and the unsustainable status quo. Thereby, it implies dealing with and utilising passions and affects within the research process. Implications and operational suggestions for biodiversity value research applying the agonistic model are outlined. These include changes in the research structure, eliciting negative attributions and marginalised or missing values, and altered communication within group valuation settings. This article is relevant to researchers in biodiversity valuation and facilitators of value negotiations that aim to achieve value integration.

**Keywords:** value integration; biodiversity; identity; conflict; agonism; deliberation; aggregation



**Citation:** Fickel, T. An Agonistic Perspective on the Challenge of Biodiversity Value Integration. *Sustainability* **2023**, *15*, 16932. https://doi.org/10.3390/su152416932

Academic Editor: Alan Randall

Received: 21 September 2023
Revised: 8 December 2023
Accepted: 12 December 2023
Published: 18 December 2023



## 1. Introduction

Supporting the integration of plural values (IoPV) of biodiversity into policy is a crucial goal of biodiversity science as part of facilitating transformative change [1]. Nonetheless, conflicts between various socially shared and transcendental values, combined with the dominance of non-sustainable values, often hinder value integration [2]. Until now, the biodiversity research literature is dominated by two models, which claim to provide orientation for research dealing with eliciting biodiversity values and contributing to the conflictual IoPV. The economic model describes conflicts as the social counterpart of trade-offs between management options that can be dealt with through preference satisfaction and aggregation [3]. The deliberative model describes conflict as a communication situation and proposes reasoned argumentation in the public sphere as a conflict management process [4]. Both models are dominantly used in biodiversity research to ground research on the IoPV and contain theories of change.

Nonetheless, both models have limitations, which reveal themselves in addressing conflictual identification processes with biodiversity values and related affects. Here, the case study of the transformation of agro-systems in north-western Europe illustrates the relevance of identification processes within the IoPV. Within this sector, value conflict and the dominance of non-sustainable values hinder value integration. At the same time, many scholars observe a hardening or, in some cases, escalation of conflicts (e.g., in Germany [5] or the Netherlands [6]), with conflict dynamics related to apparently incompatible shared

and transcendental values, which are expressed as identity components of parties. As this includes seemingly "irrational" and passionate conflict behaviour, the identity dimension often proves to be a barrier to biodiversity conservation. The latter becomes evident when protestors demonstrate, not solely due to economic hardship but also due to their alignment with values such as "entrepreneurial freedom" which they perceive as being under threat. The same applies when parties identify strongly through a confrontation against other parties and their values. This phenomenon seems most pressing in the current growth of right-wing rural movements in Europe [7]. Furthermore, policy implementation in practice is often thwarted by a lack of implementation by farmers, who express incompatibilities between their values and those that serve biodiversity value integration [8].

In the face of these phenomena, it is interesting that the field of biodiversity science concerning the IoPV has little reference to the broad theory discussion in political science on an agonistic model. This model locates affective identification processes and the irreconcilability of identity conflict in its centre. A distinctive feature of the theory of agonistic pluralism is that it includes the abovementioned role of passion, power relations, and the inherent need for identification processes to antagonise. Nonetheless, vast parts of the debate on the IoPV still utilise the economic and deliberative model for conceptualising research.

Thus, this article will explore whether the so-called "agonistic model" [9–17] can provide new insights for research on the IoPV. In doing so, this article will answer the following research question: What insights does an agonistic model offer for analysing and promoting the integration of the multiple values of biodiversity? The thesis of this article is that the economic and the deliberative models do not produce robust and transformative outcomes as they do not provide sufficient orientation when it comes to the hindrance of the IoPV through affective and somewhat "irrational" conflicting identification processes. It will be further argued that in applying the agonistic model, biodiversity value research gains another option for eliciting transformative values and transformation knowledge for the IoPV.

This article will focus on Chantal Mouffe's proposal of "agonistic pluralism" as it is one of the most discussed approaches in the political scientific debate on agonism. Therefore, I aim to link the model to current debates in biodiversity research, which have shifted in recent years towards a more substantial notification of a barrier to value integration, consisting of value conflicts rooted in worldviews [18] or identities [8,19–21]. This implies the relational turn [22–25] and includes claims for approaches that examine conflicts between transcendental and shared values [26–28] and conflict transformation frameworks that highlight the importance of identity in conservation conflicts [29–32]. The argumentation will be illustrated through the conflictive transformation of agro-systems in north-western Europe. Afterwards, operational suggestions for biodiversity research will be provided. I will show that the agonistic model urges researchers to reflect deeply on their "political-strategic aspirations of transformation research" [33] comprising implicit theories of change for the IoPV.

## 2. Existing Models and Gaps

Research on the plural values of biodiversity and their integration into policy involves dealing with two barriers. The first barrier to value integration denotes the lack of knowledge about biodiversity values, their coherent relationship, and related valuation methodologies (value visibility barrier). Clear distinctions between various types and perspectives of value have emerged in this discussion, with multiple frameworks offering structured approaches for evaluating how humans value nature [1,28,34–37]. Assessing the value of biodiversity involves distinguishing between instrumental, intrinsic, and relational values within different levels of individual and socially shared values and different levels of concretisation from assigned to transcendental values [1]. The latter are defined as overarching and socially shared principles that guide human perception, evaluation, and behaviour, as well as transcendent specific situations [38], and function as identity

components, meaning that they play a key part in the self-definition of many actors. In the following, I refer to these as "identity-related values".

The second barrier is grounded in the fact that conflicting plurality and the dominance of specific values prevent comprehensive value integration (value conflict barrier). Stålhammar (2021) puts it this way: "[. . .] [T]here is no reason, in theory, to believe that descriptions of people's current values, perceptions, and preferences with respect to nature reflect how we should value nature or that they resemble 'sustainable' values. In fact, there is reason to believe that it is the other way round" [39]. Machin and Ruser (2023) make a similar point in highlighting that civil society can act as both a catalyst and a barrier to the IoPV [40]. A crucial but understudied question for research is, therefore, how to mitigate transcendental and social value conflicts to achieve value integration [2]. Following this idea, I will summarise how two dominant models of value valuation and integration in the biodiversity value research debate—the economic and the deliberative model—relate to this question. It will be distinguished how they relate to (I) the value visibility barrier, (II) the value conflict barrier, and (III) the conflict mitigation processes contributing to the IoPV.

### *2.1. The Economic Model*

Neoclassical economics addresses the value integration barrier by providing a model that assesses the value of biodiversity using quantitative indicators. Research focuses on analysing the potential and actual supply of ecosystem services and the potential and actual societal demand [41,42]. The concept of ecosystem services has been applied to measure human use of biodiversity [43] in various highly influential assessments [44,45]. A broad underlying assumption of the model is the idea of value commensurability [46,47]. Value commensurability describes the idea that all biodiversity values can be compared and ranked on a metric scale and thus put into a logical relationship with each other. In applied research, this has resulted in a conceptual approach that assumes that the main research interest in eliciting biodiversity values is to understand individuals' preferences towards these values. Measuring individuals' willingness to pay is a commonly utilised way for operationalisation. In general, this framework proposes an understanding of the principal value integration problem as a lack of quantification of biodiversity values and, thus, a lack of ability for policymakers to take these values into account in policymaking.

When dealing with the plurality of conflicting values, the economic model relies on the assumption that individuals are primarily motivated to maximise their own welfare and achieve "preference satisfaction" [48]. According to Bartkowski and Bartke [49], the model conceptualises individuals as informed consumers who mainly follow instrumental rationality, have predefined preferences, and consider contextual values instead of abstract values. Identity is mostly understood as a precondition of individual preference formation or the result of collective preference aggregation. Regarding the latter, social choice theory revealed paradoxes in democratic processes in the "rational" translation from individual to group decisions (see, e.g., the Condorcet, Arrow, or Sen theorems).

Within the consequentialism of the utilitarian approach, individuals focus on the concrete outcomes of a decision situation. Here, the economic model describes conflicts between different value preferences in situations of incompatibility as trade-offs [50,51]. Trade-offs are understood as situations in which a loss of (often assigned) value in one dimension (e.g., reduction in production output) is equal to a gain in another dimension (e.g., increase in species richness) and implies that values can be traded off against each other. The main problem of conflicts is the trade-off nature of decisions, which implies that "we cannot have it all" [52] and implies decisions about scarce resources.

Trade-offs are a characteristic of the optimal target state for conventional economics: the Pareto efficiency. This state is characterized by an optimal distribution of resources, "in which no other allocation of resources could make at least one individual better off without making anyone else worse off" [43]. Conventional economists favour the achievement of this state through the price mechanism. The mechanism allocates resources and goods

to actors willing to pay the most. Under restrictive assumptions of human behaviour, it can be mathematically shown that in situations of voluntary exchange, price mechanisms' allocation of resources achieves free markets' economic surplus. One significant condition for the mechanism to function is that all involved goods have market prices. This again leads to the above-mentioned value elicitation barrier, which implies that all involved ecosystem services need to be monetarily valorised [43].

Other crucial models for conflict in economic theory are game theoretical considerations of actors' behaviours in conflict. Game theory implies that all actors in conflicts have an ordered list of preferences and act in a way that ensures the maximum realisation of these preferences. The benefit of game theory is to demonstrate conflict dynamics or outcomes that logically derive from the emerging patterns of actors' behaviour and conflict structure. Here, the tragedy of the commons is one of the most popular examples in environmental sciences [53]. Game theory is widely used as a basis for directing environmental policies towards efficient outcomes, as it allows the modelling of environmental economic strategies [54]. Nonetheless, in terms of conflict mitigation, the economic model favours utilitarian–consequentialist, aggregative [13] (p. 192) and [51] policies that generate maximum welfare for as many actors as possible. If one looks at policy practice, this model is the basis for many policy instruments that include some form of value compensation for biodiversity measures, such as agri-environmental measures [55] or payments for ecosystem services [56].

The model raises many critiques, and I will briefly mention four. First, some critique that individuals do not have explicit, predefined preferences and the ability to translate them purposefully into monetary terms [3]. Second, a more philosophical axiological argument supports this critique by rejecting the assumption that the plurality of values is commensurable. In this respect, Martinez-Alier et al. [57] mentioned that a major problem in environmental decision-making is that policy and research have to deal with the weak comparability, if not incommensurability, of values that cannot be brought into a logical relationship, thus creating dilemmas for decision-makers [57–60]. Third, some state preferences do not capture the multiple and often conflicting motivations that underlie respondents' preferences [3]. Fourth, a more normative critique sees the model as discouraging respondents from taking society and future generations into account (ibid.) and, through monetary biodiversity, reinforcing the problem of a hegemonistic, instrumentalist, and domination-oriented worldview [61]. The critiques show that the model includes only a narrow set of value types and is, therefore, ill-suited to deal with conflicts that comprise identity and values as identity components.

### *2.2. The Deliberative Model*

Accompanying the critique of the economic model, a deliberative model of value elicitation and management has gained increasing recognition [62–64]. In contrast to the economic model, it sees a crucial challenge for value integration efforts in bringing to light all the non-monetary values that people prioritise that relate to their existence as social beings. Deliberative multi-stakeholder processes are seen as a robust value elicitation and negotiation tool that can overcome the shortcomings of economic monetary approaches. As a method, deliberative elicitation aims to bring actors into a dialogue group setting to exchange perspectives on biodiversity values and to enhance learning and preference formation within the process. This process ensures that participants do not just focus on their individual preferences but consider a broader range of value types, including identity-related values. It generates outcomes by a reflective dialogue, leading to a more robust assessment of values in general and "outperforming conventional monetary valuation" [64]. The deliberative model suggests that individuals' normative judgments about biodiversity values can be understood not as mere expressions of individual preference but as principled expressions of public interest [65]. In addition, Irvine et al. [66] note that values are created within a valuation process and do not exist prior to the elicitation process. They are created by exchanging and rationally arguing about reasons regarding a specific topic. Social and

shared values within groups, rather than individuals, emerge as the ultimate outcomes of such processes [4]. In practice, deliberative approaches help reflect the heterogeneity of actors and are seen to be able to deal with their conflicting identity-related values [63,67].

However, research on deliberative assessment tools has not exclusively aimed at describing biodiversity values but has responded to a growing awareness that "value integration may need to be considered as a social process involving conflict resolution strategies" [27], which goes further than preference aggregation. Deliberative processes are thus understood as "democratic spaces" in which "people can generate, explore and share their values" and "form shared contextual values informed by the elicitation, discussion and ordering of transcendental values applied to a specific context" [66]. Kenter [68] describes evaluation processes as a "transformative process" in which participants "develop a shared understanding and dialogue about what matters most in life". Shared and social values are thus more likely to (a) include social values that regulate social interactions and conflicts and (b) describe actors' shared values towards the environment. The deliberative value formation (DVF) model [4] assumes that deliberative processes increase the parties' trust, capacity for deliberation, and understanding and shift the value orientation towards the common good.

Proponents of deliberation imply that solutions to value plurality emerge from applying communicative rationality, argumentation, and consensus building [69], where relevant actors build shared understanding [70] between different valuation perspectives and scientific knowledge and form binding shared and social values. Deliberation creates shared social values that engage citizens [1] (p. 38) and [68,71], which are characterised by communicative capacity and not just individual interest maximisation. In summary, this model suggests that the normativity of ideal public reasoning legitimizes solutions and can ensure social justice [62]. Alternatively, as Westphal (2019) describes it: "[P]rovided that disturbing factors are prevented, reciprocal reason-giving enables the identification of what is in the interest of all" [72]. This involves a theory of change that addresses conflictive identity-related values based on at least two assumptions. First, a social learning process leads to the formation of contextual shared values, including pro-environmental values, and their implementation within public institutions [73]. Second, deliberative processes have the potential to activate pro-environmental (transcendental) values and increase their relative influence over other non-environmental values [38]. Through both processes, there is an ongoing "expansion over time of our 'ethical envelope' of the environment" [66].

### *2.3. Current Blind Spots*

An agonistic critique towards both models highlights that they rationalise political engagement and leave out or even suppress the crucial role of affect, antagonism, and passion within the process of identification [13] (p. 181). This leads to two weak points. Firstly, they tend to hinder radically different alternatives and, secondly, create non-robust outcomes.

The first point would imply that the resistance of many farmers against value integration results from missing opportunities to passionately strive for and identify with alternative democratic projects and related values. Here, some of the few agonistic critiques of consensus-oriented deliberative approaches in biodiversity science question the emancipatory nature of deliberative approaches in bringing to light alternative values that differ from the precarious and dominant status quo. In this regard, Matulis and Moyer (2017), referring to a debate on "inclusive conservatism", note that participatory processes often tend to "discipline" marginalised views and blur them in the process of integration [11]. Machin (2020) urges that the deliberative discussion of scientific knowledge may simply confirm the status quo rather than offer radical innovation [10]. In a similar vein, Borras urges the question of whether inclusive "multistakeholdernism" as a strategy of inducing transformative change is too "polite and neat" towards powerful conservative actors [74]. In terms of the task of value integration, this critique is significant as it raises the question of how the economic and deliberative model can meet claims that understand the IoPV as

creating fundamental change in political institutions rather than mere value integration in policy [75].

Concerning the second point, the argument states that the outcomes of aggregative and deliberative mechanisms are not robust in re-emerging conflict and, thus, incapable of bridging identity-related conflicts [72]. Even deliberative scholars mention open questions regarding the durability of shared social values elicited through deliberative methods [66]. Here, some empirical evidence shows that participants avoid discussing some values in a deliberative group setting due to the fear of internal and external conflict [64]. This may indicate that deliberative settings that aim to achieve a consensus-oriented outcome face difficulties when parties perceive conflict as deeply rooted and thus provide non-robust outcomes.

Following these two critiques, I argue that the economic model in general, and the deliberative model in part, lack a decisive recognition of the rigid and conflictual nature of identity-related values and the implications for radical rather than incremental change. Identity-related values defy quantification or the logic of argumentation and relate to behaviour that seeks out passionate and seemingly "irrational" tendencies in conflict that are important in their impact on valuation and conflict behaviour. This would be linked to emerging research on relational values [35], which highlights how people personally and collectively relate to biodiversity in terms of identity rooted in worldviews [18,76].

Taking up these shortcomings, the next chapter will provide an overview of Chantal Mouffe's model of agonistic pluralism, which is formulated as an alternative model of democratic legitimacy within value plurality and could be a candidate for providing orientation with regard to the gaps mentioned above. Since Mouffe herself does not consider the task of integrating biodiversity values, I will transfer her ideas into the debate and describe an agonistic understanding of how to deal with conflicting value integration.

## 3. The Agonistic Model

### *3.1. The Agonistic Model and the Value Visibility Barrier*

For an agonistic understanding of the value visibility barrier, I draw on Laclau's and Mouffe's book "Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics" [12] and Mouffe's further reflections on "agonistic pluralism" [14–17,77]. The authors follow Marxist perspectives on political struggle, social contradictions, and the analysis of temporal hegemony while rejecting the idea of an underlying determinant economic structure. As defined by Laclau and Mouffe, society is "dislocated" and has no overarching path or ideal state as a goal [12]. Within their theory, processes of social communication create values and wave them into discourses that provide the symbolic patterns for collective identities. Thus, values of biodiversity do not exist outside of human perception [78]. Identities are understood as webs of meaning that provide the symbolic structure for groups' self-definition and attribution. For example, the idea of a "good conventional farmer" could be linked—as a chain of equivalence [79]—to broader values of "productivity", "orderliness", "expertise", "pragmatism", and "stewardship" but also to "use" and "control". The authors suggest that significations, which include values, only make sense within such a network and not as individual elements. Discourses encompass all meaningful articulations as an "incommensurable totality" [80] (p. 70) of human reality [81] (pp. 20–21). Regarding collective identities, the agonistic model, like the deliberative model, focuses on shared, relational, and transcendental values.

Value is understood as enacted rather than as a fixed essence or entity, and this understanding is consistent with calls to strengthen relational and processual approaches in sustainability science [23]. Here, Himes and Muraca (2018) point out that "orientations to the world are mediated, influenced, and co-determined by socially shared horizons of meaning that shape shared narratives, institutions, norms, and habitualised practices" [24]. How we come to regard something as important is the result of social processes of value formation and transformation. Nevertheless, Laclau and Mouffe suggest that discourses are always contingent, unstable, and contested and only temporarily provide stable network

structures. They see discourses as contradictory and constantly in flux. Due to their contradictory structure, different political projects (e.g., modernist conventional agriculture versus peasant ecological agriculture) fight for the temporal stabilisation of discourses, which is called hegemony, [12,81], thus offering different configurations of signification.

From this perspective, the main problem of value integration is a hegemony of significations that does not include the equivalency of plural values of biodiversity in institutions. The dominance of monetary and/or instrumental valuations of ecosystem services in biodiversity research is part of a hegemony of market-oriented liberal shared values. It is associated with institutions that signify and thus produce mainly monetary and quantifiable indicators of instrumental, assigned values as part of an economic modernist or ecological modernist political project (see [82] for a study in France).

Agonists would argue in this regard that democracy must provide space for an ongoing struggle for counter-hegemonic political projects that challenge the dominance of the hegemonic projects [83]. One of Mouffe's criticisms of the deliberative and economic models is that neither accentuate a space for the radical contestation of existing hegemony. Furthermore, aggregation or "rational" communication stabilise existing hegemonic chains of equivalence, as they do not produce a radical plurality of values but align value expressions [13]. The model would suggest that if scientific methods are to provide a deep exploration of divergent values, then science should focus on eliciting values in situations where parties do not see the need to reach consensual articulations but instead insist on articulating difference and contradiction [72]. As Matulis and Moyer (2017) mention, differences between different shared and transcendental values become more visible in conflict spaces, where the search for consensus or shared values would blur the often-distinctive features of values that make sense as chains of equivalence that oppose hegemonic articulations [11]. The implication is that counter-hegemonic spaces better elicit and represent marginalised and alternative perspectives than deliberative settings, in which they tend to be disciplined [84].

### *3.2. The Agonistic Model and the Value Conflict Barrier*

The argument becomes apparent when considering the agonist response to the value conflict barrier. Agonist scholars argue with Mouffe that conflict constitutes politics and democracy [14,77,85,86]. Moreover, value conflict is inevitable and unsolvable on an ontological level, as the formation of a political identity is tied to the definition of an incompatible "other". In the realm of politics, this construction relies on the distinction between "self" and "enemy", which Mouffe defines as the fundamental operation of political articulation and describes as "the political" [83]. She builds on Carl Schmitt's dictum that this distinction is at the heart of the political, leading to the inevitability of antagonism [77]. Antagonisms are structural dualisms that describe a discourse divided into two main areas [12]. One area of meaning describes the "self", the identity of one's group, its values, interests, goals, characteristics, and the broader meanings of the objects that matter, such as biodiversity. The antagonistic boundary distinguishes these more positive significations from the signification of the "other", the political enemy. This "other" is similarly constructed as equivalent elements, opposed to one's own chain of equivalence. The opposing chain is constructed as the reason that prevents the full realisation of one's own identity and is linked to an imagined idealised future, which Glynos and Stavrakakis (2004) call a "phantasma" [87]. This split is essential because collective identities tend to perceive the present state as contradictory, imperfect, and "becoming". Since every discourse often contains the struggles of different political projects, it, therefore, depends on the struggles of incompatible networks of meaning and opposing constructions of desirable futures [12].

Mouffe's drastic critique of economic and deliberative models follows from these theoretical insights. She argues that deliberative ideas of a rational integration of competing normative meanings in a neutral arena of politics are not possible because the political is inherently dependent on difference and exclusion in the realm of identity [77]. Discussions

about biodiversity value integration have yet to consider this core argument of Mouffe's work on agonistic pluralism. Here, the problem of value incommensurability is approached through a better classification and conceptual integration of different values and value lenses. From an (post-structuralist) agonistic standpoint, value incommensurability is constructed differently in specific conflicts, and commensurability and comparability depend on the temporarily conflicting chains of equivalence and opposition.

However, not all forms of agonistic differentiation are problematic for democracy. Mouffe suggests that liberal institutions should encourage and manage agonistic relations with parties and their struggle for power as an inherent feature of politics and democracy [88]. On the other hand, antagonism, which means portraying other political parties as enemies with fundamentally illegitimate claims [77], should be tamed (to agonism) and thereby excluded from the democratic struggle. Conversely, political agonists accept others as legitimate opponents and competitors in the struggle for hegemony.

However, a key lesson for biodiversity valuation debates is that even agonistic relations involve irrepressible negative attributions like external attributions and stereotyping. These are constitutive of identity-related values. Focusing on the biodiversity value conflict, one can assume that any self-description of shared or transcendental values is linked to negative attributions and exclusions. This can be observed in conflicts between conventional farmers and nature conservationists in Germany. Agonistic relations intensified in large parts of the discourse on biodiversity protection and the use of pesticides. This process led to various articulations of stereotypes and negative external attributions between the groups, often preventing integrative solutions. My experience in the field shows that, in interviews, conservationists sometimes articulate farmers as somewhat nihilistic and selfish subjects who care less about nature than about increasing profits. This can be interpreted as the constitutive other side of their perception as altruistic and non-profit oriented. On the other hand, the farmers' projections of conservationists as lazy and lacking expertise function as a constitution of their identity as rational entrepreneurs. These constructions function as self- and value-assuring identity structures by "pushing back" the other side, limiting constructive communication and value integration [89]. Furthermore, this mobilisation of affects in conflict strengthens in-group cohesion and channels the frustration of parties arising from perceptions of the imperfect status quo [90]. Thus, affectivity and passion are necessities for political identification and are linked to the formation and expression of the collective identities at stake in political conflict. Due to this unavoidability of affects in the social/political sphere, the articulation of biodiversity valuation and agonistic relations can be seen as two sides of the same coin. Although consensus temporarily mitigates value conflict, othering is always present and can tip over into antagonism. This happens if identities related to suppressed ways of valuing nature do not find legitimate ways of being articulated [77]. Here, Mouffe sees another weakness in economic quantification and communicative rationality, as they are unable to process passionate identification and agonism within conflict mitigation [72]. To sum it up, the agonistic model conceptualises actors in conflict first and foremost as passionate competitors who strive to achieve their goals and assert their identity-related values in the political realm.

### *3.3. The Agonistic Model and Conflict Mitigation*

However, how would the agonistic model guide conflict mitigation leading to the IoPV? By emphasising the necessity of conflict and the impossibility of final closure, Mouffe (and other agonistic theorists such as Tully [91] or Connolly [92]) provides an orientation through principles, which can regulate conflicts. These include taming, agreement, understanding, and pluralisation [72,85].

Because Mouffe assumes the constitutive role of conflict in politics, which cannot be fundamentally resolved by quantification or communicative rationality, she argues for the taming of conflict [13] (p. 232). "Taming" means transforming antagonism into agonism by providing institutions and a "common symbolic space", rooted in the signifiers of "freedom" and "justice" in which parties can pursue their distinctive goals while recognising

each other as legitimate competitors [77]. Conflict regulation takes place by building stable relationships between the parties rather than by rationalising the "content" of the conflict. Agreements between parties are the main outcomes. These are not primarily based on a quantifiable state of all preferences (economic model) or a consensual, rational solution that reflects the public good (deliberative model). They are temporary ad hoc constellations, shaped mainly by power relations, persuasion, and newly emerging or activated chains of equivalence that can define a "constitutive other" shared by most parties and temporarily channel collective passions. The guiding principle can be described as an "understanding-oriented mediation" [93] between the parties, not based on argumentation but on the recognition and possible appreciation of distinctiveness, which has also been called "agonistic dialogue" [94].

Interestingly, the agonistic model shows an opposite movement regarding conflict resolution to that offered by the economic and deliberative models. Rather than concretising and rationalising the content of the debate, the agonistic model proposes to pluralise and expand perspectives and value articulations and evolve social relations, which endure difference and disagreement. Here, democratic politics and legitimate conflict resolution are rooted not only in public reasoning but also in the provision of ever-present emancipatory political participation [72]. Democracy is understood as a challenge and dismantling of hegemony through the ongoing expression of pluralistic and conflicting positions [13] (p. 159). The elicitation of social values is conceivable in this model within approaches that open spaces for the articulation of emancipatory counter-hegemony, the possibility of forming new alliances, and an ongoing process of inclusion that does not primarily focus on inclusive outcomes [11]. Agonists assume that this expansion creates the potential to change institutions [83]. Thereby, it should be clarified that expressing new ideas alone is not decisive. Instead, it is the possibility of disruptive and non-reconcilable potential, or as Machin (2019) puts it: "An agonistic approach would be wary of the idea that political change occurs simply through the recognition of different perspectives, rather than by challenging prevailing ones [. . .]" [9].

Table 1 summarizes the economic, deliberative, and agonistic models regarding the two barriers and conflict mitigation measures focusing on the IoVP.

**Table 1.** Three models and how they deal with conflictive integration of values into policy.

| | | Economic Model | Deliberative Model | Agonistic Model |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Value visibility barrier** | **Value focus** | Assigned values, preferences | Assigned values, shared and social values, transcendental values | Assigned values, shared and social values, transcendental values |
| | **Reason for missing value integration** | Missing quantification of biodiversity values | Missing recognition and fostering of value plurality, especially shared values | Missing recognition and fostering of value plurality, especially counter-hegemonic values |
| **Value conflict barrier** | **Actor model** | Informed consumer, gain-maximiser | Reasonable citizen oriented to the common good | Passionate competitor |
| | **Conflict model** | Trade-off | Miscommunication, knowledge differences, missing knowledge | Fight and identity conflict |
| **Conflict mitigation leading to VI** | **Conflict mitigation** | Aggregation | Consensus, argumentation, public reasoning, position/perspective alteration | Taming, arrangement, pluralisation, understanding, relationship-building |
| | **Guiding principle** | Economic rationality | Communicative rationality | Augmentation |
| | **Theory of value integration** | Price regulation | Discernment in biodiversity protection (social learning) and activation of pro-environmental values | Hegemony-shift through ongoing conflict, probably formation of new chains of equivalency |

## 4. Implications for Biodiversity Research

What still needs to be added is a discussion of the implications of the agonistic model for research on the IoPV. I argue that its focus on the augmentation and recognition of identity and value differences provides crucial implications for research on the IoPV. These implications primarily comprise dealing with and utilising identity-related values. This, nevertheless, implies a reflection of the political-strategic aspirations of transformation research. In the following, I will discuss these with a focus on stakeholder-inclusive research practice. General implications and concrete operational suggestions for biodiversity research on conflicting values will be outlined. I will distinguish between the research structure, elicitation, and communication. Table 2 provides an overview of the suggestions.

**Table 2.** Implications of the agonistic model for research in IoPV.

| Research Structure | Elicitation | Communication |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Grounded in societal analysis of hegemony and counter-hegemony | Elicit negative attributions as integral part of valuation and worldviews | Consciously use negative attributions for framing research |
| Conscious stakeholder in- and exclusion | Focus on marginalized and excluded values | Use negative attributions to mitigate value conflict |
| Agonistic spaces to elicit distinctiveness and alternatives | Elicit "empty positions/values" | Open to persuasion, figuration, rhetoric, etc. |

### *4.1. Research Structure*

The structure of agonistic biodiversity value research aims at eliciting knowledge that challenges existing institutions and ways of valuation. As mentioned above, this implies creating support for or location within counter-hegemonic projects. Thus, transformation research complying with the agonistic model should not exclusively rely on the pacification of conflict but instead on informed gearing and partly supporting confrontation.

Research should build up on mechanisms and methods that classify values as suitable or non-suitable for transformations to sustainability instead of primarily aiming at their integration. Such an orientation would require a solid societal analysis of the structures and antagonisms in which the research process is located, which probably hinder the transformation towards sustainability [33]. It would contain a coherent hypothesis of transformation knowledge linked to specific political projects and their ideological contents and existing goal knowledge. Such an analysis would address the following questions: Which hegemonial and counter-hegemonial projects exist? What ways of valuing biodiversity do they contain? How are non-hegemonial ways of valuation excluded from discourse and practice? Which actors and projects concentrate the most power and hinder the IoPV? Which counter-hegemonial projects need to be supported to achieve a further pluralisation of the debate? Based on such rigorous analysis, the research could—instead of economically aggregating or deliberatively integrating all involved perspectives—focus on the formation of alliances between selected adversaries to challenge existing hegemonic discourse and elicit related transformation knowledge.

Regarding the inclusion of stakeholders, the reliance on the agonistic model results in a different research practice compared with the aggregative and deliberative models. Regarding biodiversity conflicts, both often imply the involvement and equal contribution of all affected stakeholders within transdisciplinary processes. Research relying on the agonistic model would not comply with these standards. This approach might require that researchers consciously exclude hegemonial and unsustainable actors and their positions from the research process. For transdisciplinary research, for example, this implies that the selection of stakeholders should not be guided by the inclusion of all affected and influential stakeholders, as is often proposed [95]. Following the above-mentioned societal analysis, researchers must decide which actors they see as primary agents of change within

emerging counter-hegemony. Conversely, this implies defining which actors and positions are the main obstacles.

Another possibility of applying the agonistic model can contain the inclusion of all relevant stakeholders. Nonetheless, in this variation, the facilitation would follow agonistic conflict-resolution norms [72]. Research could examine stakeholder interaction, focusing on what values and value negotiation outcomes are achieved when stakeholders interact with a focus on exploring differences. This implies a deepening or accentuation of the demarcations between actors. Of course, the careful facilitation of these settings, ensuring the taming of communication and agonistic respect, would be necessary. Nonetheless, such processes would highlight the irreconcilability of valuation perspectives and radical alternatives and their relations to the existing status quo. This does not negate the assumption that different positions need to be aligned for transformative change at some point. However, researchers would first and foremost focus on the elicitation of alternatives to open space for the emergence of distinct values and positions.

### *4.2. Elicitation*

What entities are elicited through the application of the agonistic model? Here, I suggest three possibilities: negative attributions, marginalised values, and empty positions.

First, disclosing negative attributions could be a crucial part of agonistic biodiversity research. As mentioned above, negative classifications emerge as a necessary part of conflictual identification processes. They are thereby linked to the formation and articulation of socially shared and transcendental values and worldviews. Their examination enables a better understanding of value negotiations. It could provide insights into why parties perceive their values as incompatible and thus contribute to an explanation of actors' perception of the conflictive IoPV. The elicitation of negative attributions could be integrated into biodiversity value elicitation processes but would require an operationalisation of post-structuralist and/or social-psychology concepts.

Second, the agonistic pluralist claim of an ongoing pluralisation of integrated values brings marginalised values to the centre of the attention of research. Marginalised values are not represented in hegemonic discourses and provide the necessary irritations to expand the plurality of values for integration and bring a progressive transformative potential [72]. Agonistic research should focus on highlighting such perspectives that are barely visible within the hegemonic discourse. Concerning agriculture in Europe, values could be primarily examined that challenge the hegemony of techno-economic and ecological modern positions [82]. Moreover, the elicitation could bring into light unusual combinations of values and positions and highlight their distinctiveness.

As mentioned above, agonistic facilitation highlighting the distinctiveness of positions rather than their integration fosters the elicitation of marginalised values in group settings. On the other side, it can be assumed that plural and distinct publics have benefits towards one inclusive, deliberative public, which may discipline multiple positions in the process of creating shared values. Thus, a second method could be to avoid "inclusive" deliberative settings and choose deliberative settings, which only comprise particular and distinct groups, with the aim of eliciting values that are radically distinct.

Third, inclusive, deliberative processes could be augmented with methods that display "missing" positions and values. These values are not represented or imagined by actors in the process. One example of how this could be achieved is by using methods such as "positional maps" from situational analysis [96]. This method illustrates missing positions relevant to specific settings. The exercise includes the creation of an inductive framework that structures and displays the existing positions and value expressions. With this framework on the other side, it is possible to identify combinations of values which are not mentioned and are thus "invisible" to actors. A similar effect could also be achieved by using current typologies of plural biodiversity values to inform stakeholders which values dominate, and which types are entirely missing. After identification, an examination could clarify how missing values can challenge and irritate the status quo.

### *4.3. Communication*

Research following the agonistic model puts a particular focus on the handling of negative attributions within the research process. This focus leads to different conclusions compared with the economic and deliberative models. Where both aim at de-escalating negative attributions, the agonistic model allows for gearing and utilising them by means of eliciting values and transformation knowledge. In this regard, three suggestions will be briefly explained.

First, utilising negative attributions impacts the overall framing of the research process regarding its location in a societal setting. Thus, communication with stakeholders about the research process and research task includes the communication of negative attributions, which are derived from the aforementioned societal analysis and rooted therein. They function as motivations of stakeholders and steer their affects in a specific direction throughout the research process. This approach implies that social-ecological problems are not only framed as a lack of knowledge and technical value conflict but also as a probably irreconcilable societal struggle in which the research process is located and takes a transparent (and of course, criticisable) position.

Second, using negative attributions impacts the model of conflict mitigation between stakeholders applied within the research process. If the process aims at the alignment of stakeholders' value perspectives or the mitigation of value negotiations, the creation of a shared "other" attached to negative attributions could be considered. This functional agonistic "other" would serve as part of a conflict frame congruent with the societal analysis grounding the research. Again, integrating selected values would not be inclusive for all "stakeholders", only for those who accept the agonistic frame. For example, one could accept the thesis that de-regulated capitalism is a major systemic cause of the lack of meaningful value integration and the continuing need to utilise and destroy biodiversity [74,97]. This acceptance leads to agonizing over the growth and land-grabbing of big agro-businesses, which operate at the cost of small- and middle-sized businesses. Setting this agonistic frame, researchers could explore how identification processes and associated values within such a frame might emerge and consolidate. Again, the focus lies on their radical distinctiveness and ability to counter existing hegemony. Here, setting a clear frame through negative attributions steers the outcomes of being more challenging to the status quo.

Third, the agonistic model impacts the understanding of how the communicative alignment of values and positions operates. Communicative means in an agonistic process are not limited to preference ordering or exchanging reasons through rational argumentation. Considering the non-rational dynamics of identification processes, persuasion through figuration or other rhetoric means and the expression of emotions would be allowed and examined. The agonistic model describes the guiding principle of eliciting values and transformative knowledge as a tactical, creative, situated, and incoherent task. Thus, communication is not solely formatted by the ordering of preferences or rationalisation of reasons. Furthermore, it considers that collective identities and worldviews are not coherently derived from broad values but are idiosyncratic configurations of seemingly incompatible values and beliefs [98]. From this follows the involvement of methods including visual and narrative expression and group-forming [99,100], and common or divergent reframing [101,102] that help participants express, imagine, and passionately experience new chains of meaning.

## 5. Conclusions

In this article, I demonstrated how research supporting the integration of plural values of biodiversity into policy is based on at least two dominant models of plural democracy: the economic and the deliberative models. Both models provide answers on how to deal with two barriers to the IoPV: the "value visibility barrier" and the "value conflict barrier". I argued that conflicts about identity-related values pose a problem for both models as they

defy the logic of rational integration. To address this problem, I examined the insights of an agonistic model of value integration regarding both barriers.

Here, I showed that the agonistic model builds on the idea of the irreconcilability of identities and thus provides differing explanations and goals towards the IoPV. Regarding the first barrier, the agonistic model proposes value elicitation that highlights the particularity of values and the search for incompatible and radically different values. Regarding the second barrier, the agonistic model proposes considering the confrontational dynamics of identity-related values perpetuating conflict management. Based on this assumption, value mitigation cannot rely on economic or deliberative rationality to finally resolve conflicts. It can only create space for a plurality of parties to legitimately express their identities and values while strengthening their relationships and negotiated arrangements. Furthermore, researchers should utilise and not neglect negative attributions in eliciting transformation knowledge. All these implications challenge researchers to critically reflect on the inherent theory of change that underpins their biodiversity research.

In the end, I would like to note that this article argues for a pragmatic use of the different models to generate transformative outcomes for value integration. I do not opt for a complete replacement of the economic or deliberative model by the agonistic model. As briefly mentioned, the agonistic model itself has limits, such as a structured approach for the mitigation of conflicts. Due to its relatively "tragic" perception of politics, including the assumption of its irreconcilability, it cannot provide orientation in replacing political struggle. Thus, I argue for a conscious interplay of all models within IoPV research to compensate for their characteristic weaknesses and to apply them with a view to a specific goal. How this pragmatic use of the models looks, or if a meta framework is needed to integrate all three models for value integration, has to be tackled by future research. The differing theoretical (and partly ontological) assumptions grounding the models make this endeavour difficult, but the research approaches for addressing the conflictual IoPV could be more diverse. However, given the increasing need for far-reaching change in policies and social institutions, research on biodiversity values needs to at least reflect on the often hidden politically presuppositional theories of change. I hope this contribution provides some orientation for biodiversity researchers for this task.

**Funding:** The author received funding from the project 'Diversity of Insects in Nature protected Areas' (DINA) funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF); grant number: 01LC190) and the NormA project, which is part of the institutional cooperation between ISOE—Institute for Social-Ecological Research and the Senckenberg Research Center Biodiversity and Climate (SBiK–F).

**Data Availability Statement:** No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

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