



Partecipazione e Conflitto
* *The Open Journal of Sociopolitical Studies*
<http://siba-ese.unisalento.it/index.php/paco>
ISSN: 2035-6609 (electronic version)
PACO, Issue 7(2) 2014: 360-383
DOI: 10.1285/i20356609v7i2p360

Published in July 15, 2014

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

DYNAMICS OF PARTICIPATION

Access, standing and influence in contested natural resource management

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ABSTRACT:

Although participative measures were introduced in 2001 to support dialogue on large carnivore presence and the aims and justifications of national predator policy, polarization has remained between pro-wolf groups promoting fauna diversity and the groups maintaining that rural Sweden is jeopardized by the re-appearance of large carnivores. Through empirically investigating the participatory process itself, we address how the local environment of RPG members is situated in the deliberative setting of the groups. By taking account of the local community context, we emphasize that divergent perceptions of the local environment, together with the landscape as a context of relationships between those using its resources, form an informed basis for action. In sum, we examine how participatory voices can be supported and maintained given the existence of a contingent social situation in which particular interests, values, and norm systems meet.

KEYWORDS:

Regional Predator Groups, participation, contingency, decision-making, large carnivores

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, increased public involvement in decision making has been incentivized in response to changes in the role of the central state. Because representative democracy in many countries is deemed too hierarchical and bureaucratic to deal effectively with complex issues involving different actors with divergent interests (Dalton 2004; Blumler Coleman 2013), state authorities initiate efforts to improve and extend participation. Mobilizing a broader array of state and non-state actors in the policy process, to deal with issues of collective concern and to seek acceptable outcomes, is thought to allow for more socially efficient and robust decisions (Barber, 1984; Fisher, 2000; Meyers and Vorsanger, 2007; Pateman, 1970). Based on the normative ideals of shared responsibility and mutual learning, this form of governance, where the central government formally delegates power to actors or institutions at lower political or administrative levels, has widely been advocated as a useful way of handling conflicting goals (Agrawal and Ribot 1999, Mandella and Steelman 2003, Pomeroy 2003). Environmental management is a case where the acknowledgement of the perspectives, assumptions and values of non-state actors and their tacit knowledge and complementary skills, is now a recurrent theme (Bulkeley and Mol 2003).

Using the empirical example of Swedish wildlife management and the implementation of Regional Predator Groups (RPGs), initiated in 2001 to promote dialogue on how to support the ongoing recovery of protected large carnivores, this article will explore the social, cultural and organizational conditions that create and sustain participatory practices. In particular, the contextual dynamics of RPGs will be investigated according to the analytical components of access, standing and influence – all of which suggested helping both the design and the assessment of participative efforts (Fung 2006, Senecah, 2004). By studying multi-stakeholder environmental advisory groups in Swedish predator management, we emphasize how the RPGs – a participative experiment staged in response to conflict and a desire for conflict resolution – are related to local and organizational dynamics concerning the nature of the issues and stakeholders' relationships with the issues. It will be highlighted how citizenry inclusion in planning can be considered as a social form of expressing social structures and power relations, as well as a governmental process staged to resolve conflict. This is underpinned by contrasting ideas of this kind of democratic activity and roles of authority (Blaug, 2002, Cooke and Kothari, 2001).

Because of different horizons of perception and expectation of this kind of activity, the members of the participatory process will find themselves immersed in a process of 'collective brokering' (Wenger, 2008 [1998]) over values and ends, attributions of meaning, and normativity (Boholm et al 2013, Renn, 2006). In this sense, the participation process is 'an uneasy marriage' between different understandings of democracy (Blaug 2002). At the same time, it is an activity in which different frameworks of meaning and rationales of action become mobilized, performed and contested. This highlights the importance of understanding the relationships between socially and culturally framed commitments and motivations for engagement, organizational requirements and customary practices.

2. Communication and empowerment in environmental decision making

In theory, the multiple conditions of modern democracy demand mechanisms that can assist decision makers in yielding practices and public action that different groups of actors in society can perceive as desirable, legitimate, fair and efficient (Fung 2006). Efforts to increase local participation and collaboration at various levels may, however, prove difficult to realize due to measures that involve a wide array of actors and organizations, each of which has its own set of values and agendas for participation (Tapela *et al.*, 2007). For example, consensus on interventions to support the management of large carnivore recovery may be difficult to achieve due to value-driven circumstances that enter the participatory process, despite the fact that this issue is discussed in participatory venues. Similarly, the implementation of ecosystem strategies may feature locally undesired and politically unintended consequences and have both tangible and intangible impact on local communities (e.g. Treves *et al.* 2006). Conflicts concerning management as well as the perspectives and knowledge that should take center stage in the planning process may therefore arise (Tsing, 2001). New institutional approaches emphasize how different conceptions of time, social and cultural norms, and symbols are formative for organizational action and generating an unfixed and unstable decision-making process (March and Olsen, 1984). For example, the 'logic' of judgments and decisions undertaken by the administrative agent not only is a matter of being attentive to administrative regulations, but also something acquired by personal values and experiences (Sjölander-Lindqvist and Cinque 2013).

Interweaving of public, private and voluntary actors is also likely to be caused by the ways formal institutions and structures influence and set criteria for participation. One such set of conceptual models refers to the conclusion raised by Blaug (2002) regarding that democracy can be understood as "an uneasy marriage between two different political projects" with different "locations within the structures of power" (p. 105). This means that authority building on representative democracy, conceptualized as 'incumbent democracy' by Blaug, rationalizes the exercise of institutional power through votes as the form for orderly civic input into politics and institutions to achieve effectiveness. This form of power, however, is put under challenge when the public resists, disputes and is suspicious of representative-grounded and strict rule-governed authority. This so-called 'critical democracy' becomes an attempt to empower citizens through open argumentation and debate in previous peripheral sites and locations for democracy (Blaug 2002). Ideally, this mode of democracy is fair and the discussion format allows the inclusion of different voices and to express, acknowledge and respect the arguments (Habermas 1987).

Similarly, it has been suggested that the operational form, substance and mechanism of public participation processes help to explain why certain public-inclusive strategies fail (Chess and Johnson, 2007; Depoe *et al.*, 2004; Fung 2006, Hajer, 2005; Senecah, 2004; Young, 2000). Shared and agreed knowledge is not automatic (Flyvbjerg, 1998; Pieterse, 2005), but may instead be employed as an incentive to serve the interests of dominant actors (Martin, 2007) and to legitimize certain voices and certain power structures (Fisher, 2000; Gray, 1989; Short and Winter, 1999). Cox (2010) claims for example that the promotion of cooperatively agreed upon en-

vironmental decisions may be dismissed when authority officials to ensure the creation of arguments favoring a coveted decision, construct particular actors (often local residents) as having “indecorous” concerns and opinions about the issues at hand (Cox, 2010; cf. Hendry, 2004).

This points to the importance of facilitative leadership, which becomes particularly crucial when stakeholders do not share ownership of the process and its outcomes. In such situations, leaders must assume the role of an honest and unprejudiced broker to keep and stimulate citizens’ trust in the bureaucratic system (Ansell and Gash 2007; Vangen and Huxham 2003). To accomplish this and establish legitimacy, meeting procedures must be designed to allow for the consideration of alternatives and the wide range of goals and objectives that are present in these situations. Leadership in participative situations must also build on a willingness to share power with stakeholders (ibid.).

Interaction patterns tend to revolve around negotiation and struggle when the interests of different individuals, groups and sectors become involved (Colebatch *et al.*, 2010, Mollinga, 2008). Richards and Kuper demonstrated in the early 1970s that decisions, for example, in tribal or parliamentary councils, vary in clarity, solidity, probability, and certainty (Richards and Kuper, 1971, cf. van Asselt, 2005). As suggested, when the emotion, imagination, memory and vision of the different members enter the deliberative process, value-driven circumstances will engender different selections, attributions of meaning and normativity (Boholm *et al.*, 2013, Kaufman, 2006 [1960], Shore *et al.*, 2011). Consequently, the decision-making activity becomes chained to probabilities and attributes of the particular situation (Toda, 1976). At times, it may lead to disagreements on the motivations and measures for actions to be taken (Winter, 2007, Vinzant and Crothers, 1998, Zinn, 2008).

From this it can be concluded that measures promoting increased public involvement suggests instead of facilitating communication, engagement and citizen empowerment, tensions and incompatible social and cultural frameworks may hinder negotiation and consensus (Tapela *et al.*, 2007; Terence, 2008; Vääntänen and Marttunen, 2005). The interweaving of diverse actors, all with their own agendas and values that impinge on their participation, mobilizes “different frameworks of meaning and rationales of action” (Colebatch, 2010, p. 31). Such frameworks or ontological representations of how to understand and embrace the world and act accordingly therefore likely underpin and structure participatory and collaborative measures (Healy, 2003).

2. Participatory Design

Based on the above considerations, it can be asked how participatory processes can be designed to allow for the inclusion of different voices and to provide the participants with an equalized decision space (Walker, 2007), and what can be done to inspire citizen empowerment instead of hindering mutual agreement and legitimizing agency policy implementation (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Through the model “Trinity of Voice” (TOV), Senecah (2004) offers a participation format proposed to facilitate communication and citizen empowerment in the field of

environmental decision making and management. In accordance with the 'democracy cube' proposed by Fung (2006), the TOV model focuses on the operational characteristics of dialogue processes with regard to access and inclusivity in environmental decision making, processual space and potential influence; it offers a model composed of different but yet interlinked criteria to attend to in order to allow for the neutralization of possible political antagonisms that also broadens the conceptual framework of public participation (Cox, 2010; Martin, 2007; Senecah, 2004; Walker *et al.*, 2006). In Fung's 'democracy cube', these three aspects are referred to as 'scope of participation', 'mode of communication', and 'extent of authority'. Both Fung and Senecah argue that when the synergistic dynamics of access, standing and influence are considered, it allows us to monitor the participatory process, and assess whether it has succeeded or failed in empowering people who traditionally have not been part of the decision making process.

Considering the practical aspects of the participatory process – including for example who among the public has access to participatory venues, meeting places and committee meetings – we can identify which factors may contribute to successful or unsuccessful outcomes (Ansell and Gash, 2007). Access, accordingly, corresponds to an attitude of collaboration and readiness to involvement and some basic rules in order for the participatory measure to arrive at procedural legitimacy (Ansell and Gash, 2007).

The second criterion, standing (processual space or mode of communication), deals with aspects of how participants interact within the venue, such as opportunities for dialogue and deliberation, active listening and courtesy, the reflection of genuine empathy for the concerns of other perspectives, dialogue, debate and feedback (Singh *et al.*, 2007). According to Ansell and Gash (2007), a process perceived as fair, clear and consistent leaves the participants confident in the dialogue and negotiation as real.

The final criterion – influence or extent of authority in relation to the link between venue discussion and practical input in public activity – can, according to the two models, only be attained if the first two components have been provided for the participants. This means that, for example, my priorities were considered although they may not have been awarded space in the final agreement and solution. I was provided a transparent decision space through which alternatives for choice criteria were deliberated. As motivated by Senecah, without transparency and openness, the participants will lose hope, promoting frustration and resulting in loss of trust in the process.

Consequently, if given access and sufficient access to a dialogue process about which I am informed and in which I have appropriate means to express myself, I will be better at receiving and showing respect, thereby increasing my ability to consider other opinions (cf. Habermas 1987). The second and third components – standing and influence – are dependent on access: I was given the opportunity to voice considerations and opinions in a climate that allowed for varied communication. These dimensions together – participant selection and practical provision, a communicative format allowing for a pluralism of values, and extent of influence - yields what Fung refers to as a 'three-dimensional space', a 'democracy cube', or the comparative

'Trinity of Voice' as referred by Senecah. Both models may, as suggested, help to design better processes (Fung 2006, Senecah 2004, Singh *et al.*, 2007, Walker *et al.* 2006).

4. The Study

Exploring the implementation of the RPGs, the article is inspired by an 'institutional ethnography' approach whereby organizational relations, situated in particular places at particular times, are objectified in order to explore their existence and workings (Smith, 2001). This is consistent with anthropology of policy perspective, through which the diverse beliefs, norms and values held by the diverse actors are recognized as embedding organizational action in webs of meaning (Gellner and Hirsch, 2001, Shore and Wright, 1997, Shore *et al.*, 2011, Wedel *et al.*, 2005). In such a perspective, participation work encompasses different meanings, aspirations and intentions of those involved and emphasizes the conditions creating and sustaining this kind of policy activity and the relations and subjects produced within (cf. Geertz, 1973, Blaug 2002, Shore *et al.*, 2011). Since participatory democracy, or - using Blaug's (2002) term - 'critical democracy', enforces direct (public) input into the management process as to pursue legitimate, transparent and accountable decisions and enhance effective implementation of political decisions through the integration of local knowledge and experience (Aarhus Convention, 1998; Demediuk *et al.*, 2012), it was found necessary to also explore local community understandings of wolves, Swedish wolf politics and policy implementation. The perspectives of local residents living in or adjacent to wolf territories, supplied an empirical basis to contextualize and add insight to points of connection between RPG member perspectives and locally addressed concerns.

Fieldwork, consisting of formal and informal interviews, and participant observations, has been carried out in local communities and at the county-administrative level from 2004 to 2010. In addition to fieldwork, public policy documents, newspaper and journal articles, and websites have been studied to gain insights into the issue, its structures, actors, and the main points of the debate. Interviews and observations were carried out as a research project addressing the practices of wolf management, including the implementation of participative measures.

The interview section included three main groups of informants: local residents in geographical areas with wolf presence, officials at county administrations, and RPG representatives in five counties. The interviews were semi-structured and were designed to suit the various categories of informants, including general questions and follow-up questions. Detailed notes were taken and later described. Due to the intense feelings associated with the issue of large carnivores, and because some of the parties interviewed have even been threatened with violence due to either pro- or anti-carnivore opinions, the interviews were not recorded for individual anonymity purposes and for establishing rapport between the researcher and the informant. Informants' trust of the researching team is fundamental to ethnographic fieldwork, as it enables informants to relate lives, experiences and feelings more freely (Bernard, 2000 [1998]).

Since farmers and hunters are the groups that have been pointed out as particularly vulnerable to the effects of the presence of large carnivores, 75 small-scale farmers and hunters, selected through convenience-sampling, were interviewed. These actors are also the main skeptics of predator policy and the management of large carnivores. To add to the empirical base on local community perspectives, those who did not practice farming or hunting were also interviewed. The main objective guiding the design of the interview plan regarding local community perspectives was to identify how local residents in wolf populated areas related to their surroundings, how they perceived the protection of large predators, and how farmers and hunters dealt with, if ever experienced, the restraints imposed by the wolf policy. Interviews with local residents allowed us to collect narratives on the presence of wolves in the Swedish countryside and gain insight into their significance-building processes.

Fifteen administrative officials responsible for the RPGs at the County Administrative Boards (CAB) were interviewed. These interviews concerned the officials' understanding and opinions on the limitations and latitude of policy implementation, role interpretation, and their experience working on highly "loaded" environmental issues. The ten interviews with representatives of nature conservation organizations, farmers' associations and hunting organizations, sought opinions on the works and foundations of the RPGs, reasons for participating and how they interpreted their role in the group, and perspectives on their role as a mediator of information between the national and the local level.

The interviewees—in both residential locations and in the settings of the authorities' implementation activities—held both pro- and anti-carnivore attitudes.

Observations were used to enhance the data because it can give the researcher a deepened sense of tacit significance of the people and activities studied. These were carried out at RPG meetings in five counties. Initially, the researcher introduced her role at the committee meetings as an observer, explaining that the observations would add insight to the public involvement process. In a few cases, the observer was asked to relay her opinions as a public administration researcher. The researcher responded by explaining that she was merely an observer. As argued by Geertz (1973), when analytically interpreting ethnographically conducted observations, the researcher should hold an emic position but also emphasize the observing role.

Both interview material and the record of each observation session were, as far as possible, coded and analyzed from field-specific perceptions and concepts. For example, observations were reconstructed and analyzed, which allowed the researcher to discern and interpret the main points of debates and dialogues. This process involves a circular hermeneutic movement. Informants' narratives are interpreted through our own pre-understandings, which are then revised and examined in the light of their responses, to allow for an analysis of tacit processes, ideologies and power relations (Fangen, 2005).

5. The policy context of the RPGs

Over the last decades, inducements for the public involvement in resource management have increased to deal more effectively with questions concerning different actors cutting across the public, private and voluntary sectors. The report on the inquiry into the implementation of the 2001 predator policy emphasized similarly, that coordination and cooperation between authorities and stakeholders had to improve in order to identify management solutions with which the different parties could consent. Simply, new modes of public participation in predator management and administration had to be developed, through which decision-making transparency and dialogue between stakeholders and the state could be achieved and enhanced. The inquiry specified the importance of regulatory renewal, and found that administration had to become more dynamic and attentive to local circumstances in order to resolve the mounting conflicts. The genetic and demographic factors affecting the attainment of viable predator populations could not solely steer decision-making. Species' impact on local livelihoods was also emphasised as vital, since conservation practices in rural areas are complicated by factors stemming from socio-cultural and political circumstances (Fritts, Stephenson et al, 2003; Pyka et al, 2007, Sand, Wabakken et al, 2004; Sjölander-Lindqvist, 2008; 2009).

Resolving the conflicts different regulatory arrangements have been staged to support ecosystem protection and help protect and recover endangered wildlife species. Following the 2001 governmental decision to support the recovery of large carnivores, concerned stakeholders and agencies were to be included in the management process to support a socially sustainable implementation of the predator policy. The fact that the long-term survival of large carnivores was to be taken as a starting point was not exclusive: according to the governmental committee of 1999, hunting interests and the prospects for continued livestock husbandry should also be taken into account since "the presence of large carnivores may affect the daily lives of people who reside in areas of large carnivores" (Government Official Report SOU 1999:146, p. 185). Since conflict has been particularly intense, largely based on the understanding that wolves' transgressive and inappropriate behaviour had to be dealt with, and local worries about destructive attacks on their living property had to be acknowledged by the decision makers, it was decided that particular attention should be paid to these concerns. The establishment of the RPGs was thus justified by the view that the design of policy to protect large carnivores should not be determined solely on biological concerns. The long-term survival of predator species was additionally dependent on considering the social, cultural and local economic aspects associated with community life, and the traditions of hunting and small-scale livestock husbandry (Government Report 1999).

Although highly valued by those committed to conservation and reversing ecological damage caused by human exploitation (Fritts *et al.*, 2003;) and conceptualized as a key ecosystem species (Mech and Boitani, 2003), the wolf is within the controversy also considered as an impediment to rural livelihoods and survival (Government Bill 2008/09: 210; Knight, 2000b; Sjölander-Lindqvist, 2009). The return of grey wolves to rural Mid Sweden has caused frustration and discontent among local stakeholders. Farmers and hunters, living in or adjacent to wolf territories,

perceive the political decision to support wolf recovery as intruding on local lives and restricting opportunities for small-scale farming and hunting (cf. Pyka et al, 2007; Sjölander-Lindqvist, 2008). It is, for example, frequently mentioned that the wolf is problematic because it might prey on animals which belong to humans, and therefore represents a menace to domestic animals. Seasonal agricultural foragers consider the tradition of moving livestock to unfenced summer pastures, grazing cattle in forests and fields next to summer farmhouses, as difficult to uphold due to the risk of predatory attack. Hunters argue in a similar vein that the hunting tradition is at stake, since dogs unleashed during a hunt may be preyed on by wolves. Since wolves prey on both large and small game, hunters also fear that the forests may be depleted of game, which they claim may well increase the risk of wolves attacking dogs. For fear of exposing dogs and livestock to prowling wolves, hunters and farmers therefore argued that the wolf population should be controlled to protect rural heritage and the rights and property of people residing in wolf-inhabited lands (cf. Fritts, Stephenson et al, 2003; Sjölander-Lindqvist, 2009; cf. Woodroffe, Thirgood et al, 2005). Although farmers and hunters, according to state regulations, may apply for the targeted removal of problematic wolves, concerned stakeholders and stakeholder organizations still claim that the consequences of wolf recovery policies and plans have been left unaddressed by decision makers.

These conflicts and incongruent perspectives on wolf presence in the Swedish countryside pit national and regional authorities and conservationists against private property owners (Decker *et al.* 2012, Sharpe et al 2002, Treves and Karanth 2003). The illegal killing of wolves is for example understood as symptomatic of the demand of skeptical parties to change the policy (Government Report, 2007, 2010; Liberg *et al.*, 2005). In response to polarized understandings, network building and mobilization of opinion have taken place. There have been complaints and protests concerning Swedish wolf policies and management, as well as pro-wolf parties raising issues regarding the obligation to support wolf recovery. At meetings organized by various anti-wolf organizations, as well as in the newspapers, speeches and visits to the Swedish Parliament, issues regarding the consequences associated with wolves in the countryside are generally addressed. By writing letters, drafting, organizing relevant petitions, introducing private members' bills in local political arenas, and at one occasion initiating and implementing a referendum, wolf sceptics have aroused public opinion. Pro-wolf organizations and individuals have in a similar vein also been active and raising issues at different political levels to support wolf recovery.

By establishing the RPGs, the authorities could learn more about the local contexts and consequences of large carnivore presence. It was also assumed that this would facilitate the dissemination of information to the local level. RPG members were encouraged to share information with their respective organizations. In this sense, the RPGs were, as sensitive to process, context, and time, intended to function as connective and transformative arenas in which appropriate understandings of the management effort and related actions would evolve (Sandström *et al.* 2009).

Despite the initiation of multi-stakeholder arenas, polarizing understandings have remained. Though the wolf population is steadily increasing and spreading geographically, pro-wolf groups continue to promote fauna diversity and believe, together with biological researchers, that ac-

tions must continuously be taken to support the survival of wolves in the Swedish fauna. Other parties continued maintaining that rural Sweden's landscape and local traditions are being jeopardized by the reappearance of large carnivores and that the implementation of wolf protective strategies is leading to the demise of forest and farm communities, and consequently, the loss of traditional knowledge, and natural and cultural heritage (Government Report 2007; cf. Lindquist, 2000).

6. The RPGs in practice

As indicated by government investigation, the RPGs have not succeeded in finding ways to deal with contradictory perspectives. Instead of promote dialogue and the exchange of views on large carnivore presence, the RPG has allowed social conflict to continue (Government Report 2007). In the following section, the three components access, standing and influence will be addressed to analyze the organization of the participation process, and thereby help provide a basis for discussing why the RPGs failed in mitigating conflicts and increasing consensus for agreed-upon decisions.

Access

In consequence of the parliament decision, 17 RPGs were established in counties with residential predator populations. The RPGs were to comprise representatives from hunting organizations, voluntary nature conservation groups, farmers' associations, police and the judiciary, municipalities, and wildlife managers from the County Administrative Boards (CABs). The local representatives of national organizations and associations are residential community members with varying social and professional backgrounds. Some of the representatives had been active in local political parties; some had none or little political experience and were instead recruited as representatives because they were experienced farmers.

National regulation requires the CABs to assume a vital role in the implementation of the RPGs. At the same time, the regulation instructed the CABs to see the RPGs as a consultative group, stating the CABs to decide what organizations would be allowed or denied access.

The size of the RPGs varied from 10 to 17 members. RPG meetings were held three to four times a year at the CAB office, and meeting agendas were usually set by the CAB and distributed to the members before the committee meeting. Meeting schedules could be decided at meetings, but according to interviews this was rare; informants related that they had few possibilities to influence the date and time of the next meeting and they explained that meeting agendas were too brief. Protocols arrived too late – if ever at all. According to a representative of the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation: "The authorities send us the protocol after several weeks, if they send it at all...". Informants referred in the interviews to how all these aspects made it difficult to discuss the minutes with their organizations.

Another aspect refers to meeting locations. In general, the meetings were held at the CAB office. Some members said that the committee meetings were held in places too geographically

remote, making it difficult for them to participate on a regular basis. Similarly, members working in the farming sector demanded the CAB take into account that they had to take care of their farms and the CABs to consider these circumstances.

In interviews and at participant observations, informants and RPG members stressed that the discretionary power of the CAB representatives did not support a trustworthy climate at the meetings. Parties that were skeptical regarding the presence of large carnivores maintained, both in interviews and at meetings, that CAB officials deliberately chose not to involve organizations that held strong anti-carnivore attitudes. The size of the stakeholder organizations was also brought up: organizations with a considerable number of members were given access to the RPG, while small, local organizations were excluded and not given membership status. A hunter's representative explains:

The "Peoples' Campaign for a New Predator Policy" has repeatedly tried to become a member of the RPG but been denied. The CAB motivated that they wanted to exclude rabid opinions.

The CAB officials explained in interviews that too strong and extreme perspectives on wolves would disturb the group, and further an already high level of polarization.

Observations revealed that the members interpreted access differently. Representatives with more skeptical opinions of large carnivores and the recovery politics described their participation in the RPGs as an opportunity to raise questions they considered vital to the survival of rural areas. Some feared attacks on humans when growing wolf populations no longer have wild prey, some argued that the presence of wolves would lead to the continued depopulation of marginal areas, and consequently, the abandonment of farming activity. Other members interpreted their presence as an opportunity to demonstrate the opinion that measures to increase predator population numbers must be taken.

Standing

The meetings were structured according to the assumption that information was a basic requirement in order to achieve conflict resolution. According to the regulatory framework, the authorities see the dissemination of information as a key to enhance more "nuanced" views of wolves and to foster local consensus (Government Bill 2000/01). As explained in interviews with CAB officials: anti-wolf groups were to be provided with "accurate information" based on "real" scientific knowledge. Therefore, committee meetings generally started with the CAB official informing the group members of the current status of the county's large carnivore populations, including propagation numbers, geographical locations, litters born, and results of population inventories. Other agencies and organizations could report on other relevant governmental aspects for the management of large carnivores. Each representative briefly reported on their activities since the last meeting, as, according to RPG regulation, members were expected to disseminate information to their respective organization.

During observations predator issues became contentious. The wolf issue attracted considerable attention, and the meetings tended to be dominated by anti-wolf views. Opinions between

the pro-wolf association, hunters' associations and CABs, differed on the numbers of large carnivores. In support of the authorities and the predator policy, carnivore proponents cited the importance of making decisions based on data from biological investigations and scientific facts, instead of simply following the authorities' fear of making unpopular decisions.

We shouldn't be afraid of increasing the interim target for the wolf population. We must disseminate correct information to the public so they can learn that the wolves aren't dangerous. (Member, Carnivore Association)

Representatives from hunting organizations responded that decisions on strategies to support population growth were not locally approved. Again, it was argued that overpopulation would possibly lead to increased attacks on private property and jeopardize rural traditions in the long term, further increasing the marginalization of rural people. The representatives saw fit to take this issue into account to help stop distrust of the authorities and implementation failure, and cited that durable population targets were due to the issue of trust in the authorities.

The heated issue of the presence of large carnivores in the countryside not only caused intense debates at meetings but also blockages. In interviews, CAB officials raised frustrations over the fact that certain organizations always try to have the last word. The administrators explained this behavior as necessary to control the meetings, and that they have dispersed them when the discussions were no longer "constructive":

We had a new member and he caused so many problems. Eventually, the group broke down ... I told them that I wanted to disperse the group ... some resented this, but that's life ... some make the decisions and some just have to adapt to them (CAB administrator).

Instead of responding to the questions from the group, CAB officials claimed that "time is too limited", affirming that they had to follow certain administrative frameworks that could not be "questioned" for regulatory reasons. Members representing the interests of farming and hunting argued on the importance of addressing local concerns. They further explained that some regions were overpopulated by wolves, leading to attacks on private property (livestock and hunting dogs) and declining game population.

In the interviews with farmers and hunters was also relayed how carnivore populations impinged on everyday practices, customary work and traditional ways of life.

It [the effects of wolf presence] influences our lives. Those who live in wooded areas—why shouldn't you pay attention to them as well? It's important to have people living in rural areas. We must keep that in mind (Farmer).

It's not just about money; it's about the possibility of carrying out farming in this region. If we find that we can't [do this], large tracts of arable land will become overgrown (Farmer).

Whereas wolf skeptics referred to livelihoods threatened by wolf presence, pro-wolf organizations and residents said that activities to conserve threatened species must be supported. They spoke of the marvels of large carnivores and of their “right” to exist in Swedish woods and lands, claiming that we are obliged to support biodiversity protection according to international agreements. Anti-wolf attitudes were at meetings and in interviews rejected as “wolf phobia”, and the current controversy the result of irrational misunderstandings of the effects of large carnivores. Just as people might be afraid of spiders, unfounded fears were argued to guide the parties’ concerns about the effects of large carnivore presence. To avoid the spread of irrational understandings on behalf of the predators, many argued for a scientifically based knowledge (for example the wolves’ behavior and role in the eco-system) to guide the discussions.

Influence

Results from interviews and observations indicate a strong call for the possibility to exert influence on management decisions. However, the members held different views on what kind of influence the organizations could exert through meeting participation. When pointing this out at meetings and demanding a more specific mandate to increase the possibilities to exert influence on management decisions, the CAB officials responded that the representatives were not intended to constitute part of the decision-making process. Although invoked as a forum for involving stakeholders in the management process, CAB officials reminded the members that they were “only doing their job and following SEPA orders”. The CAB explained that according to the regulation, the RPG was to be an advice-giving assembly and function as a facilitating mechanism for the officials: “You as a group represent a tool for us at the CAB. I will listen to your standpoints and then I will arrive at a decision, independently”.

Because some meetings did result in heated debates, the CAB officials moderated by asking the members to keep time, respect meeting agendas and speak only when called upon. The officials admitted that they tried to limit the discussions since they saw the RPGs as too time consuming. For example, instead of responding to the questioning of the routines by which CABs perform wildlife management activities, the officials claimed that “time is too limited to give an answer to that”. When the members strived to question wolf politics, CAB officials responded that the decision to support and vitalize large carnivore populations was politically agreed: the RPG was there to support the authorities in their policy implementation. As stated, “simply, it is a democratic decision that we should have wolves”, and “it reflects the Swedish people’s desire that diversity should be preserved and that the wolf should be able to live freely in nature”.

Observations from the five counties indicate how the RPG members, through their representation and presence at meetings, established and expanded their networks and alliances. In meetings, the members openly discussed carnivore protective politics. At coffee breaks, the members continued their discussions informally. In particular, members from carnivore skeptical groups talked with one another, exchanging information and experiences on large carnivore presence. Occasionally, the discussions resulted in the skeptical parties arranging lectures, information meetings and workshops locally. As explained in the RPG member interviews, by organizing these different public meetings, the stakeholder associations answered the demand

among local communities to be informed on predator management. More importantly, it gave the stakeholder organizations the opportunity to receive feedback and gain a broader base of experiences on the consequences of large carnivore presence.

The belief that decisions on various aspects of predator populations, to a much greater extent, must encompass local perspectives was confirmed in community interviews. In these interviews, farmers and hunters held that wildlife management must consider local realities of rural life. As a result of local experiences of marginalization, network building and mobilization have taken place to oppose the threats the presence of large carnivores is understood to bring to the forest fringe areas. Perceived as contributing to expanded networks, and thereby a broadened basis of experiences, local community fieldwork indicates that mobilization campaigns were introduced to support the building of knowledge.

At RPG meetings, the members expressed the importance of keeping an open dialogue with each other and to be informed on the local conditions following predator presence. The ability to express one's opinions on how wolves and other large carnivores affected people's lives was considered important. Members understood the opportunity to throw light on theirs and others' everyday experiences as a means of influencing other parties' views with regard to the carnivore issue.

The authorities don't care much about the committee meetings. I'm there to inform the other members. I want them to know that my and my family's lives have changed a lot as a consequence of the wolf's return to my hereabouts. (Farmer's representative)

As mentioned earlier, the RPG representatives were expected to constitute a channel through which information and knowledge on the large carnivores could be disseminated to the general public. At one meeting, members of the group openly stated the importance of entering into a dialogue with local communities, informing them on how RPGs work with predator management. In later interviews, members were of the opinion that not much effort was made to expand communication between the RPGs, local residents and interest groups. According to the representatives, this was due to their confusing management role and, among the skeptical party organizations, that the authorities lacked competence in reference to rural conditions.

The RPG has no anchor in the realities of people. We lack concrete insight into local lives and realities. We have no contact with those stakeholders that have experienced wolf attacks on their livestock. We don't dare to go there and inform since no one would listen to us. The trust for the CAB doesn't exist where I live (Hunting interest representative).

In addition, certain members explained in interviews that conflict levels would rise if they were to tell their neighbors that they were part of the RPG, so they didn't divulge their representation.

7. The participatory interface in Swedish predator politics

Both Fung and Senecah argue that the criteria of access, standing and influence must be fulfilled if participatory processes are to result in citizen empowerment and efficient and lasting policy decisions. This investigation of the RPGs demonstrates how these three dimensions can be utilized to explore why participatory efforts may fail to provide empowerment of policy decisions. Analyzing the operationalization of participative experiments according to how participants are provided access, standing and influence, we can discuss which factors may encourage or discourage successful communication in natural resource decision making. In particular, through analyzing the RPGs in terms of these categories, the paper demonstrates how participatory processes, as vehicles of policy work, are concerned with: 1) the functions of leadership; 2) how interaction is organized; 3) how points for discussion are recognized; and 4) how participation is relational and locational, and resembles process and context.

Focusing on *access* we notice that the groups are subjected to a strong administrative leadership, informed by natural science education, which controls the admission to the process as well as the course of the discussion. From previous studies we know that leadership is important for involving stakeholders and then mobilizing them to move collaboration forward (Ansell and Gash, 2007; Vangen and Huxham, 2003). Also, the more the stakeholders fundamentally distrust each other, the more leadership must assume the role of an honest, fair and unprejudiced broker (Ansell and Gash, 2007). In our case, we find the chairman acting as a controller, assuming a role that has hindered communication within the process. Through the employment of administrative discretion—afforded through a lack of guidelines from the national agency on how to implement the RPGs—the chairman (CAB) could decide on which organizations should be allowed to participate and which questions should be negotiated at the meetings. The lack of clear rules and regulated praxis resulted in the rise of discretionary space (Cinque, 2011), and the CAB officials could transform their moderating role into a decisive one. By doing this, they solved the dynamic tension between autonomy and control that has been found to thwart collaborative work. In attaining the administrative goals of efficiency and effectiveness, the officials tailored their own routines to manage the task of public involvement (cf. Ingram, 1990). Consequently, the officials could, despite the fact that the RPGs were invoked as a forum for the exchange of perspectives and experiences, refrain from considering member opinions and advice—a strategy that accordingly, centralizes the power to the agency (Cox, 2010; Hendry, 2004; Walker *et al.*, 2006) and rationalizes the exercise of institutional power to achieve effective decision making (Blaug 2002). They decided whom to exclude and include, and advocated that committee meetings were not intended for fundamental decision influence. They operated, to apply the terminology of Lipsky (1980), as “gatekeepers” when given preferential right of mandate interpretation.

In addition, the initiation and implementation of the RPGs were concealed by aspects related to the implementation framework: the distribution of power, process design and how participation was defined. The fact that agency officials could interpret and adapt experimentally to the boundaries provided by politics and regulations, led to strengthened administrative discre-

tion (Galligan, 1986). When officials could decide on how to put political decisions into practice, they were, as discussed by Lipsky and Meyers and Vorsanger, given the power to contribute to the public's perceptions of the character and effects of government policies.

Regarding the opportunity for trustworthy dialogue (*standing*), the study of RPGs reveals that different ideas and opinions on the representatives' role and the mandate of the RPGs led to a deepened divide between the parties. The process was complicated by the fact that the members had different expectations as to what they might achieve through their participation in RPGs. While the leadership and pro-carnivore associations wanted to discuss the implementation of the parliamentary decision on wolf management, other parties raised questions about representative-grounded and rule-governed authority (Blaug 2002). For example, to counteract polarization and hostile climate, the officials adopted different strategies to speed up the discussions that led to the establishment of a knowledge hierarchy, whereby experientially-based knowledge was considered subordinate (Scott, 1998) and the locality discourse maintained by certain actors dismissed. They reminded the group that there was a stipulated agenda steering the meetings and that time was limited. The RPGs simply functioned as an activity whereby different meanings and rationales for engagement and different democracy projects were deliberately mobilized, performed and contested.

Whereas the skeptical parties argued on the basis of experience and local community situations, pro-carnivore parties argued that the predators had the same right as humans to exist in the fauna, and for policy implementation to be guided rationally instead of being supported by unfounded fears on the presence of large carnivores. Whereby the pro-carnivore parties arguing for the globalized discourse of biodiversity protection to be maintained as a guiding rationale in discussions, the scales of the local and the global competed and the RPGs embedded in a wider socio-political context (cf. Martin, 2007).

Despite developing from an understanding of the importance of providing stakeholder's information on, and insight into, decisions with regard to large carnivores, the work and results of the RPGs were affected by different interpretations of *influence* over the process outcomes. The empirical study demonstrates that when the officials understood the RPGs as a measure to facilitate policy implementation and increase public acceptance, carnivore skeptical parties interpreted the RPG as a channel to give voice to local concerns, and as a means for contributing to a rearrangement of politics and administration. Because of the different interpretations of power and influence, the carnivore skeptical parties created their own ways to publicize their standpoint outside the group. Some representatives organized public meetings to inform other stakeholders, while others participated in protest movements and networks. These resistances were effectively based upon local community perspectives: results from interviews with local residents indicate a strong call for the ability to influence, in order to counteract marginalization (Sjölander-Lindqvist, 2008, 2009; cf. Skogen and Kränge, 2003).

Since people participate for different reasons, have diverging interests and sometimes hold incompatible values and beliefs, participative experiments will be complex, as these become the arenas for the negotiation of social and cultural matters (Buchecker *et al.*, 2003). It is argued in the literature that people's experiences and memories, knowledge, and understandings of hu-

man and natural worlds constitute important elements of decision making, contributing to competitive interpretations of “reality” and rendering shortcomings in policy implementation (Shore *et al.*, 2011; Walker *et al.*, 2006). Similarly, the RPGs demonstrate how measures intended to counteract public alienation and distrust of government institutions may, instead of consensus and cooperation, uphold disputes over the consequences, benefits and disadvantages of policy decisions. This is in line with theory where trust is suggested as a vital component in collaborative decision processes (Ansell and Gash, 2007; Vangen and Huxham, 2003) and whether the issue at hand for the participatory forum is antagonistically embedded (Gray, 1989). Here, a pre-history of bitter division and strong antagonism between the involved stakeholders obstructed the process—an aspect that has been launched as hindering collaborative decision processes (Ansell and Gash, 2007; Gray, 1989).

Access, standing and influence are intrinsically connected to the contextual conditions in which the participative experiment takes place and that this connection need to be better addressed in order to complete participative experiments in a successful way. We see that issues of cultural identity, expediency and morality permeated the participative process. People’s conceptions of how to manage the biological environment were conditioned by deeply held attitudes and values concerning their local environments and the surrounding world. The RPG participants showed that their conduct inside the group, their expectations and their choices were strongly influenced by their perceptions of the surrounding cultural and natural environment in which they live and work. This adds to the interactive dimension among the three analytical components that have been used to explore the work of the RPGs. The representatives in the group are much disposed to listen to other opinions (standing) when they are given convenient time and place to discuss as well as readily available information and technical equipment in order to explain their own standpoints of (access). Similarly, a transparent and open discussion (standing) is strongly related to the opportunity to inform the final decision as well as the process outcomes (influence).

8. Conclusion

This paper was framed as an empirical study in which the value of the participatory experimental context is made clear from examination of the RPG case. The paper has addressed RPG practice as an example of a participatory process aiming to foster consensus on policy implementation. Using the frameworks provided by Senecah and Fung, we find that when exploring the different horizons of perceptions and expectations of this kind of activity, the members of the participatory process find themselves immersed in in a process of ‘collective brokering’ (Wenger, 2008 [1998]) over values and ends, attributions of meaning, and normativity (Boholm et al 2013, Renn, 2006). Exploring the RPGs according to the dimensions of access, standing and influence we find socially and culturally framed commitments and motivations for engagement, organizational requirements and customary practices that influence each component. Together they generate additional contingent issues: 1) leadership functions; 2) how interaction is orga-

nized; 3) how points for discussion are recognized; and 4) how participation is relational and locational, and resembles process and context.

This kind of interaction and processes, aimed at increasing local participation and collaboration in decision making, is conceived differently depending on the actor being positioned as a defender or challenger of politics and policy. The analysis has demonstrated how any form of public participation involves the structuring of contextual and multilayered experiences in terms of values and ends, attributions of meaning and normativity (Boholm et al 2013, Renn, 2006). The interaction taking place within the venue of the RPGs, aimed in theory at increased local participation that would complement the formal management process and expected to generate trust in, credibility for, and commitment to predator policy implementation, and to reduce conflict long term (Cinque 2008; Cinque and Sjölander-Lindqvist 2011; Sandström *et al.* 2009), built on various and contrasting ideas of this kind of democratic activity and roles of authority (Blaug 2002, Cooke and Kothari 2001). We find that, as the participatory process is generated and sustained by the complexities and contradictions arising from the political decision to revive large carnivore populations, the RPG advisory arena concerned itself with negotiating tensions and contradictions. Shore et al.'s view that "policy creates links between agents, institutions, technologies and discourses and brings all these diverse elements into alignment" (p. 11) engenders sensitivity to local accounts and plural meanings. For public involvement measures to be operationally successful in terms of adequate inclusivity, access, processual space, and potential influence, participation must be understood as encompassing and manifesting the tangible conditions and associated values of participants and their contexts. We conclude that, by highlighting the connection between these dynamics and the operative steps offered by Senecah (2004) and Fung (2006), we can explore the conditions that create and sustain participatory practices and their outcomes.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT:

The research on which this paper is based derives from funding provided by the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (Naturvårdsverket) and the Swedish Research Council (Formas). We would also like to thank our informants who lent us their time and made it possible for us to carry out our research. Finally, we gratefully acknowledge the very constructive and helpful comments and suggestions for improvement of the paper that were provided by the review process.

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