

The great illusion: Collaborative governance and the conflict over the wolf in Finland

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Abstract

Finnish wolf policy has involved collaborative elements for decades, and collaborative features have recently been increased while the policies have been adapted. Yet, conflicts over the wolf have rather escalated than calmed down. In my presentation I will first outline the key milestones leading to the current regime and situation. These include: Finland joining the EU in 1995 and the consequent change of the legal context as well as practices of governing the wolf; the dramatic drop in wolf numbers in the winter 2010 as a consequence of rising rural anti-wolf movement; and the adaptation of the regime of governance since that, including the reform of the hunting quota system. Second, I will illustrate the challenges of collaboration with examples concerning collaborative production of knowledge about the wolf. Co-production of annual estimates about wolf numbers is historically the most established form of collaboration in Finnish wolf policy. It is also at the heart of the conflict over the wolf. The practice of researchers and hunters co-producing wolf numbers reveals some key problems in the collaborative governance regime: 1) collaboration has become instrumental rather than helped defining shared goals, or not even reflecting on the multiple goals of wolf management; 2) collaboration has prompted participation in a partisan rather than deliberative fashion; 3) collaboration has empowered certain actors and strengthened their role in wolf policy but not created situations in which the positive outcomes of collaboration (e.g. new knowledge, skills) would have enhanced collective problem solving capacity. These observations form challenges of collaborative governance from the perspective of conflict resolution. They suggest that although collaborative regimes may be meaningful and attract participants and lead to the adjustment of principles, norms and procedures of decision-making, they may continue to sustain conflicts.