

Making nudges: updating the Finnish wolf management plan

Finnish wolf policy is reaching a *cul-de-sac*. Wolf population has stagnated on a low level, while the wolf–human conflict is intensifying. Civil society is calling for more close-range decision making powers on wolf territories and, simultaneously, the wildlife administration is expressing express ideas about “territory politics”, meaning that wolf management should be planned on territory level. The purpose of our pragmatist transdisciplinary action research was to help to merge these interests. As part of updating the wolf management plan, we organized ten wolf territory level workshops in southern Finland in the fall of 2014. In this paper, we describe the institutional and social-ecological modifications that were written into the wolf management plan as a result of these workshops. Territory level power was exercised, hope fulfilled and a promise given. No doubt, the Finnish government and the European Commission follow with interest what will happen on Finnish wolf territories.

1 Introduction

Finnish wolf policy is reaching a *cul-de-sac*. Wolf population has stagnated on a low level in the country, but at the same time the wolf–human conflict is intensifying. The top-down regulation of the wolf issues faces strong and persistent resistance, the *ex-ante* and *ex-post* damage compensation schemes as well as the increasingly accurate information about the numbers and the origins of wolves are not really helping the people to live with them. Legislative confusion, civil disobedience and anxiety add to administrative frustration, characterizing the current situation.

Civil society is calling for more close-range decision making powers on wolf territories and, simultaneously, the government and the wildlife administration are expressing ideas about what they call “territory politics”, meaning that wolf managerial planning and decisions should be taken more actively on territory level. These interests seem to merge.

In practical terms, local interests meet the administration’s interests in the preparation of the wolf management plan. The Finnish Wildlife Agency is in charge of the process of updating the national wolf management plan in 2014. The Finnish Game and Fisheries Research Institute participated in the process and turned it a pragmatist transdisciplinary action research. We conceptualized the task as a problem of institutional fit. Especially, the purpose of our work was to find ways to overcome the impasse and provide bottom-up policy advice to make the arrangements fit the problems with the wolf better. It was

central to this approach that we concentrated on concrete action designed and eventually executed by local actors – deciding by doing.

2 Theoretical perspective

In the current situation, it seems that there is a gap between the governmental purpose and the civil society customs and ways of life on wolf territories. Wolf policies have been designed and implemented in such ways that the status of Finnish wolf population is not favorable. The situation calls for new more workable management tools to tie government and civil society together in solving wolf-related problems and allowing tolerance for the impacts of the wolf. That is a general task of our work.

We conceptualize this as a problem of institutional fit, i.e. societal principles and rules do not help to fix the environmental problem they are intended to solve and may, as in this case, even worsen the problem. Following Young (2002), a number of scholars currently claim that ecosystem properties, social-ecological interactions and institutions governing productive practices vary in degree how they fit together (Farrell & Thiel 2013).

Institutions constitute scaffolding for social-ecological activities. They constrain, liberate, and expand individual actions, but do not dictate in detail which actions must be taken or which actions are allowed (Commons 1990). Institutions, in other words, control, coordinate and induce individual and social action for better collective outcomes (Vatn 2005). Institutions constitute an incentive structure - action environments - for purposeful and habitual actions.

In a wolf management plan process, our task was to facilitate a process of improved institutional fit from below. Our premise was that the people living and working on wolf territories know the best what the problematic particulars in living with the wolf are, and, especially, they know with what kind of environmental modification the presence of the wolf would become less disturbing. The challenge of institutional design is then to modify the composition of items in the action environments sufficiently in order to produce improved outcomes. Our task was to facilitate this process of finding concrete

modifications in the action environments on wolf territories and develop these modifications into locally-driven projects.

3 Materials and methods

We organized a series of ten workshops. The selection of 20-30 participants was delegated to the local Game Management Associations (GMA) and municipalities since they know better than us who are knowledgeable on wolf issues and potentially willing to engage in practical problem solving. The baseline was that all the participants live or work on particular wolf territory.

The working principles were:

a) Each participant wrote three wolf management measures considered by her or him personally important. The measures were put in order of priority. The stage lasted about 15 minutes and it took place in a shared working space.

b) While the management plan team established the working groups according to the important personal measures, the representative of the GMA presented the current wolf situation on this particular territory. After this, one of the management plan team members demonstrated the purpose, contents and expense of the updating work. This stage lasted about half an hour.

c) The participants were divided into working groups in which they discussed about (i) the measures considered by each one important, (ii) measures considered jointly important, and (iii) possible concrete project to put the measures in practice on territory: what is to be done, who does, how the financing is arranged. The third stage took from one and half hours till two hours.

d) Members of the management plan team presented the outcomes of the group work. The main attention was in concrete measures and projects with which with the co-existence with the wolf can be promoted. We also emphasized that it was important to identify things that the participants themselves would be willing to do or at least those

actors responsible for each activity would be defined. So, it was not just about listing things that should be done by *someone*.

The personal writings and group considerations were documented in detail and inductively categorized and after the series of workshops written into the management plan that was delivered to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in early December 2014.

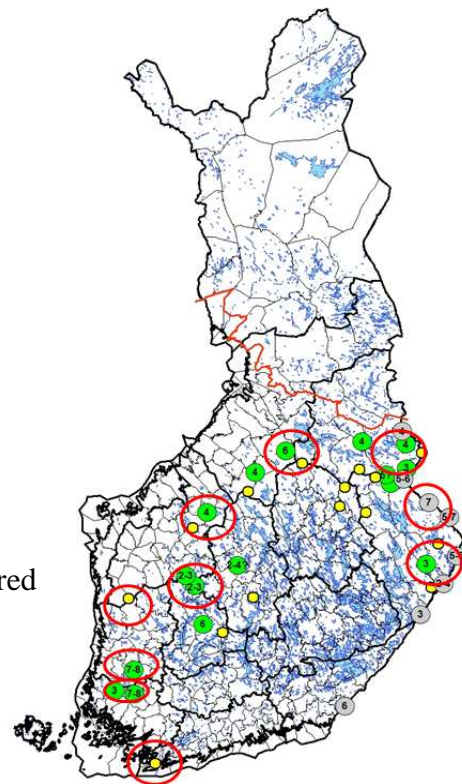


Figure 1. The workshop locations marked with red circles. Green circle is a sign of wolf pack and yellow circle that of wolf pack in 2014.

4 Modifications in action environment

For the purpose of this abstract, we summarize the type of the modifications, not the specific content of them.

The most of the modifications the participants created were *permissive*. Permissive modifications allow (free) a particular performance target on the part of individual in the realm of adaptive action on wolf territory. The most important permissive

modification was the managerial hunting of the wolf. Until now only damage-based derogating from the strict protection has been possible.

Not many *injunctive* modifications were initiated in workshops. These modifications compel (require) a particular performance target on the part of individuals in the realm of adaptive action. One of them was the regulation of wolf-dog hybrids as pets.

Facilitative modifications support individuals to continue behavior that is consistent with the long-run interests of both the authorities and those at the level of adaptive action on wolf territory. There were several key facilitative modifications the importance of which was shared amongst the workshop participants. One was a local collaborative group that would facilitate the living with the wolf on a particular wolf territory.

Inducing modifications seek to realign incentives for those settings and circumstances in which the interests of both main parties diverge. The inducing modifications in the action environment were mostly new but doable adjustments in compensation schemes.

Persuasive modifications seek to realign beliefs in particular settings and circumstances in order to fulfill a social purpose. Participants introduced several persuasive modifications. In general, a key modification related to the visibility of wolf information and knowledge production and sharing.

5 Concluding remarks

Above modifications alter the functioning of wolf-related institutional scaffolding. Some of the modifications are permissive and some are injunctive, they allow or require certain acts. Some of the modifications are facilitative or inducing, they help achieve an end or they help to bring in some balance in the face of disturbing situation. Some of the modifications are persuasive. They help to change the habits of mind.

Some of these modifications were previously considered as impossible, for example the managerial hunting of the wolf. Finnish government and the European Commission have issued Finnish wolf territories with new potential powers. Consequently, both of

them follow with interest what will happen, i.e. how these modifications might work, after they are started to put in force in early 2015.

First operational feature of all of these modifications is that they motivate the actors to act in a new way. As Hutchins (1996), Hodgson (2007) and Clark (1997) have argued, human cognitive capacities depend upon social and material environment, i.e. social interactions, structures and artifacts. In a full paper, we will develop on this and discuss in detail how created modifications operate as cues.

Second key operational feature is that some of the modifications bridge two or more organizations or activities together in order to fulfill a broader social or societal purpose. In a full paper, we will discuss this in detail.

Some of the modifications appear to be nudges. It would be surprising if not. Nudge is such modification of the action environment that does not reduce the freedom of choice, or change the incentive structures, but instead pushes the actors to more desired direction both from the social and individual point of view (on nudges, see Sunstein 2013).

Thinking with the nudges offers a way to look beyond injunction and inducements. Nudges allow and facilitate in a persuasive manner. Nudges focus on how to design, perhaps only slightly modified choice and action architectures that potentially have large effects on outcomes.

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