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This is the published version of a paper published in *Scandinavian Journal of Public Administration*.

Citation for the original published paper (version of record):

Zachrisson, A., Bjärstig, T., Eckerberg, K. (2018)

When Public Officers Take the Lead in Collaborative Governance: To Confirm, Consult, Facilitate or Negotiate?

*Scandinavian Journal of Public Administration*, 22(4): 21-44

Access to the published version may require subscription.

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# When Public Officers Take the Lead in Collaborative Governance: To Confirm, Consult, Facilitate or Negotiate?

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## Abstract

Governments are investing considerable time and resources in the field of collaborative governance as it proliferates throughout many sectors, and how public officers choose to respond to these developments therefore becomes an important question. The increased public involvement that collaborative governance brings is often more costly than traditional forms of governance, while the outcomes are highly uncertain. For these reasons, it is important that collaborative governance is only used when really warranted, and the various forms that it can take should be carefully designed. In this study, we apply a typology of collaboration strategies to examine firstly, the circumstances under which leading officers at four county administrative boards in the Swedish mountain region decide to lead collaboration, and secondly what collaboration strategies they then apply. This study is based on 20 interviews with key officers, and 39 interviews with project leaders of public-private collaborations in the area of natural resource management in the region. We find that officers should take trust levels into account when designing collaboration strategies, not least the lack of official trust. Strategies are found to be not mutually exclusive but complementary, and officers employ several at the same time. Interestingly, the results of this study show that – somewhat counter-intuitively – distrust is a driver for officers to initiate collaboration, a conclusion which questions the common view that more trust unequivocally translates into more participation.

## Introduction

The study of collaborative governance is a rapidly growing field of research (Wondolleck and Yaffee 2000, Durant *et al.* 2004, Brunner *et al.* 2005, Ansell and Gash 2008, Robertson and Choi 2010, Biddle and Koontz 2014, Emerson and Nabatchi 2015, Scott 2015) in numerous disciplines, including that of public policy and public management studies (Scott and Thomas 2017). Collaborative approaches (such as ‘public-private partnerships’, ‘public-policy networks’, ‘multi-sectoral networks’, and ‘multi-stakeholder networks’) are increasingly recommended for the governance of larger and more socially and politically complex sectors, such as environmental and natural resource management (Cash *et al.* 2006, Bäckstrand *et al.* 2010, Bjärstig and Sandström 2017). Collaborative

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Keywords:  
Environmental officers  
Collaborative governance  
Public leadership  
Collaboration  
Trust

governance is commonly defined as “a governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus oriented, and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets” (Ansell and Gash 2008, p. 2). Environmental management is generally a well-studied area in this respect; for example, the role of the state in promoting sustainable development (e.g. Baker and Eckerberg 2007) and the relationships between regulators, regulations, and non-state actors or citizens have been addressed in some detail (e.g. Wieble 2005, Hysing and Olson 2008, Hysing 2009, Matti and Sandström 2011).

The current collaborative governance paradigm highlights the need to develop leadership skills that extend beyond traditional, hierarchical, and managerial functions (Morse 2008, Sullivan *et al.* 2012). This concerns not least public administration and public officers, as argued for instance by Ansell and Gash (2008) when emphasising that public agencies have a distinct leadership role in collaborative governance. The role of individual public officers has, however, received little attention within collaborative governance (Scott and Thomas 2017), and environmental management more generally (Sevä and Jagers 2013). The limited research that is available deals with how environmental officers treat companies differently due to their various coping mechanisms (Lehman Nielsen 2006), how officers’ enforcement styles affect environmental stakeholders’ compliance with rules and regulations (May and Winter 1999), and how their norms and values impact on policy implementation (Winter 2003, Trusty and Cervený 2012).

With the rapid proliferation of collaborative governance throughout public life, governments are investing considerable time and resources, and how public officers choose to react to the fast-changing situations in which they find themselves is consequently becoming an important question to consider (Margerum 2011, Sabatier *et al.* 2005). Collaborative governance is undoubtedly bringing about increased public involvement in decision-making, however, this is often more costly than traditional forms of governance as it demands that public officers spend more time engaging and involving citizens and stakeholders. One study has shown that “involving the public in science and decision-making costs about twice as much for a project than when the work is performed without public involvement” (Till and Meyer 2001, p. 377). In addition, the outcomes of collaborative governance are still highly uncertain (Bjärstig 2017, Margerum 2011). For these reasons, it is important that collaborative governance is only introduced and used when it is really warranted, and that the forms utilized are carefully designed. Public officers may take three different roles in collaborative governance: as leader, encourager, or follower (Koontz *et al.* 2005, Scott and Thomas 2017). More research is needed to develop a robust theory which fully explains when and why public officers choose to play a particular role (Scott and Thomas 2017), and which also accounts for how they select certain collaborative tools in particular circumstances.

The objective of this paper is to develop our understanding of the circumstances under which public officers decide to play the role of leaders in collaborative governance and the tools they use. Consciously adopting the

position of a leader is obviously a highly proactive role, leading public officers to define the issues, provide resources, and establish group structures and processes (Koontz *et al.* 2005); it is also the most costly in terms of resources (i.e. time, engagement, economic funding, etc.). Different collaborative tools also have different costs, and in order to enhance policy effectiveness public officers should of course choose the most suitable tool. Following the earlier work of Focht and colleagues (Anex and Focht 2002, Focht and Trachtenberg 2005), our aim is to examine whether the decision about which tool to employ should be informed by an analysis of the trust levels existing between stakeholders and the concerned agency as well as among stakeholders themselves. Such an analysis must of course also include the views of the stakeholders and to what extent their views coincide with those of the public officers. This paper thus deals with the questions of when public officers decide to lead collaborative governance arrangements and how they design them, while taking into account the fact that stakeholders may also initiate and lead such arrangements.<sup>1</sup> These questions are more limited in scope and more focused than the approach taken by many other collaborative governance studies that are currently in progress, but we believe that they provide important information to make sense of the bigger puzzle.

The Swedish mountain region under consideration represents a critical area case study on which to construct and advance theories on collaborative governance since it is characterized by so-called ‘wicked problems’. Such problems are unstructured as it is difficult to identify precise causes and effects, as well as cross-cutting with multiple, interdependent stakeholders, and close connectedness with other problems (Weber and Khademian, 2008). The region is seen as something like the last ‘wilderness’ area of Europe, and suffers in some ways from being considered as peripheral, with a large portion of land being protected at the same time as multiple industries compete to bring in economic development. There is great pressure from mining developments, forestry, tourism, hunting, fishing, and reindeer husbandry practiced by the indigenous Sami population, leading to intensified competition over land use and multiple conflicts (Zachrisson 2009a, Eckerberg *et al.* 2015). This study explores how leading environmental officers at the county administrative boards (CABs – the regional authorities under the national government) design collaborative governance practices in this region, and how concerned stakeholders perceive their work.

The results will be of relevance to other countries with similar administrative, geographical, and socioeconomic contexts facing ‘wicked problems’, especially where public officers are expected to lead and initiate collaborative processes in relation to natural resource management. It should also be applicable to public administration sectors such as spatial planning, and to large projects such as new infrastructure and other regional developments.

## **Analytical framework**

Public officers can play a myriad of roles in collaborative governance, but Koontz *et al.* (2005) broadly categorize them into three: government-followed, government-encouraged, and government-led. These roles are not mutually exclusive and they can shift over time (Scott and Thomas 2017); although roles

were described by Koontz *et al.* (2005), a theory on why public officers choose to play a particular role was lacking. Recently, Scott and Thomas (2017) have developed a number of theoretical propositions to contextualize this choice-making, but their work still needs to be confirmed by more research. They argue that “collaborative governance represents a set of tools for solving public problems” (2017, p. 192), but they still fail to link the different roles that officers have to the tools they should employ. The focus in this study, therefore, is on the incentives that encourage public officers to take the lead in collaborative governance and the way they then enact their chosen role.

According to Koontz *et al.* (2005), public officers play the role of leader in situations where conflict has arisen between stakeholders, and/or as an alternative to imposing standards or regulations. Sometimes the officers have previously relied on top-down approaches, but even under such unpromising circumstances collaboration can still take root and replace certain aspects of more traditional processes. Officers are more likely to be the conveners, to design, implement, and manage collaboration when external funding is available, and in circumstances where existing institutions can be used, there is a perceived threat of conflict, and the convener is a central network actor (Scott and Thomas 2017). Both Koontz *et al.* (2005) and Scott and Thomas (2017) thus consider conflict as a driver of collaborative governance but without investigating it in depth.

Focht and colleagues (Anex and Focht 2002, Focht and Trachtenberg 2005) also perceive conflict as central. They have gone further, however, and developed a framework suggesting that the levels of trust among stakeholders themselves and between stakeholders and public officers should determine which collaboration strategy public officers choose. The basic argument is that stakeholders are rational and want to minimize the transaction costs of participation whenever possible. Low trust is assumed to increase stakeholders’ motivation to participate, as in these circumstances they would want to safeguard their interests when they do not trust other stakeholders and/or officers. If trust is generally high, participation may simply be more costly than beneficial (Anex and Focht 2002). In addition, it has been found that when public officers employ collaboration strategies that fail to match the stakeholders’ preferences, the latter’s trust in the officers will decrease. Not surprisingly, policy effectiveness is enhanced when public officers design collaboration strategies that appropriately match stakeholders’ participation preferences. Public officers thus need to take into account the fact that stakeholders decide whether and how they participate in policy initiatives to a great extent based on how trustworthy they judge other stakeholders and public officers to be (Focht and Trachtenberg 2005).

The relationship between trust and participation is here believed to be inverse compared to the common view that there is a positive relationship between trust and participation – that is, more trust translates into more participation (e.g. Höppner 2009, Glasbergen 2011). However, the importance of institutionalizing ‘distrust’ is well documented, not least within democratic theory (Aitken 2012), but there is relatively little empirical research addressing this paradox of participation and trust. Solitare (2005) found some evidence that a lack of trust stimulates citizen participation, while Payton *et al.* (2005) showed that social trust promotes involvement. In contrast to the conclusions of these scholars, many other studies have failed to identify a relationship in either

direction (Koontz *et al.* 2005, Raymond 2006, Duffy *et al.* 2008, Höppner *et al.* 2008, Höppner 2009).

The meaning of trust in the context of this paper is about how willing stakeholders are to give way to the competence and discretion of others to manage risk on their behalf. Two specific dimensions of trust are relevant: *social trust* – stakeholders’ judgments of the trustworthiness of other stakeholders; and *official trust* – stakeholders’ judgments of the trustworthiness of public officers (Focht and Trachtenberg 2005). Social trust usually relates to generalized trust or horizontal trust in other people (see, e.g., Putnam and Uslaner 2005), but Focht and Trachtenberg (2005) employ the concept for the trust that different stakeholders involved in the same issue area have for one another (see also Wyborn and Bixler 2013, Tsang *et al.* 2009, Neef 2008). When stakeholders trust other stakeholders, they are not suspicious about each others’ motives and are able to collaborate among themselves. Consensus on the perception of a problem and desired policy outcome increases social trust. In contrast, stakeholders tend to experience conflicts and be unwilling to work with each other if trust is low between them (Tsang *et al.* 2009). Stakeholders who profoundly disagree on policy goals and who are not committed to the idea that they need to cooperate to solve a shared problem will want to participate in policymaking only to defend their own interests (Focht and Trachtenberg 2005).

Official or decision-maker trust depends on how stakeholders perceive the technical competence of public officers and their commitment to prioritize a fair consideration of the collective interests of the public over any private interests (including their own). Public officers are trusted when both their ability and motives are judged as trustworthy, and in such situations they are able to formulate and implement policy without much stakeholder participation (Anex and Focht 2002). In situations of distrust, on the contrary, stakeholders will want to participate in order to protect their own interests (Focht and Trachtenberg 2005). Absolute trust and distrust are not dichotomous categories; in reality, they are the end points of a spectrum, and trust perceptions are also dynamic as they change when circumstances change.

*Table 1. A typology of collaboration strategies depending on levels of pre-collaboration trust (Focht and Trachtenberg 2005).*

	<b>Social trust</b>	<b>Social distrust</b>
<b>Official trust</b>	<i>Confirmation:</i> Officers assume a lead role in policy formulation and then seek confirmation from stakeholders	<i>Facilitation:</i> Officers facilitate stakeholders’ negotiations in order to forge increased social trust.
<b>Official distrust</b>	<i>Consultation:</i> Officers consult with stakeholders first before formulating policy to demonstrate that stakeholders’ interests will be safeguarded.	<i>Negotiation:</i> Officers and stakeholders negotiate together, eventually facilitated by a neutral third party.

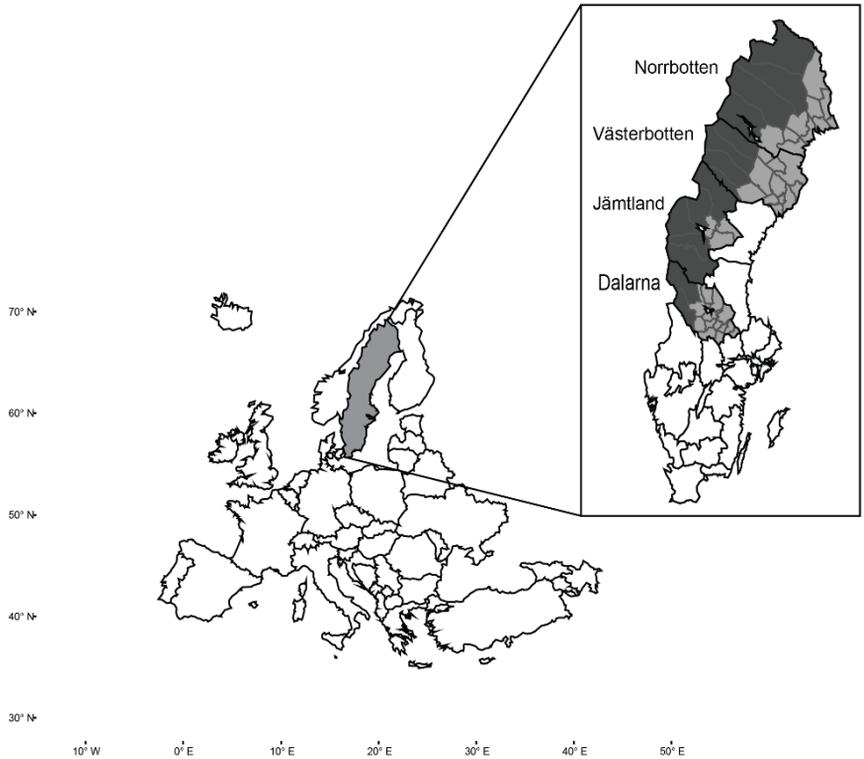
Based on the different combinations of social and official trust, there are four possible collaboration strategies: confirmation, consultation, facilitation, or negotiation, summarized in the highly simplified typology above (Table 1). *Confirmation* means that officers first formulate policy based on their understanding of stakeholder concerns, then submit the proposal and its rationale to confirm stakeholder acceptance. When there is high social trust, there is no need for resource-intensive deliberation among stakeholders but the officers need to demonstrate to them that they will safeguard their interests through *consultations*. Officers choose *facilitation* through policy dialogue among stakeholders when there is low social trust. In a context of both social and official distrust, stakeholders and officers need to participate in a *negotiation*, where officers are willing to share power when deliberating over policy direction and decisions. The officers then demonstrate their expertise and their commitment to protect stakeholders' interests (Focht and Trachtenberg, 2005).

## Method and material

The material for this study consists of interviews with lead environmental officers and project leaders of public-private collaborations in the four mountain counties of Sweden (Norrbotten, Västerbotten, Jämtland, and Dalarna, see Figure 1). The eight lead officers are responsible for initiating and implementing collaborative arrangements related to environmental management in the mountain region. The 39 project leaders were selected from a random sample of public-private collaboration projects concerned with natural resource management. The random sample was itself derived from a dataset of 245 projects that was compiled in 2013 (a detailed account of the dataset and its compilation is found in Eckerberg et al. 2015). Most of the interviews were conducted over the telephone during a period ranging from late 2014 to early 2016, and they lasted between 35 and 80 minutes (see Appendix 1 and 2). Official written documentation from government agencies (including reports, policy statements, and strategies) was used to cross-check certain factual data, and to provide background information.

In order to provide for a time perspective, 12 interviews with lead environmental officers from 2004 (Zachrisson 2004) were also reanalyzed according to the current coding scheme. In most cases, different people were interviewed in 2004 and 2014 due to both organizational change (the positions and job descriptions have changed) and staff turnover (see Appendix 1 for an overview of all interviews conducted in 2004 and 2014).

Figure 1. Map of Europe showing Sweden and the four mountain counties of Norrbotten, Västerbotten, Jämtland, and Dalarna; the 15 mountain municipalities are marked in dark grey.



Similar semi-structured interview manuals were employed for the three sets of interviews. All interviews were transcribed (following Kvale 2008) before coding was undertaken according to the central aspects derived from the analytical framework: perceptions of pre-collaboration trust (both official and social) and the strategies employed in different situations (Table 2). Specific quotes were identified and extracted to illustrate and make the analysis as transparent as possible. In order to ensure the validity of the study (see Baxter and Eyles 1997), the participants have had the opportunity to read the transcribed interviews, and they were also given the opportunity to clarify and/or alter what they had said; none of the subjects made any changes.

Table 2. Interview questions and a summary of the coding of the most central variables.

	<b>Interview questions</b>	<b>Official trust</b>	<b>Social trust</b>		
<b>CAB officials</b>	<p>Why is collaboration required in land use and natural resource management in the mountain region?                      Alternatively, why is collaboration <i>not</i> required?                      When is collaboration required? When is it less suitable? Is it different for different natural resources or situations?                      Are there examples where positive results of collaboration influenced trust positively between different stakeholders (or the contrary)?</p>	<p>Accounts where the officials described themselves as having good relationships with stakeholders, and where the motivation for collaboration is to get funding, pool resources, etc.</p>	<p>Accounts where the officials perceived that stakeholders collaborated with one another and where conflicts were absent.</p>		
<b>Stakeholders (project leaders)</b>	<p>What objectives/goals do the participants have?                      Why do the different actors participate?                      Describe when and how this collaborative project emerged.                      What level of trust was there among the partners and towards the CAB before the collaboration?                      Did trust levels among partners and towards the CAB change during/after the collaboration?</p>	<p>Descriptions of perceptions of the trustworthiness of public officials; in particular any judgments of their technical competence and commitment to a fair consideration of the collective interests of the public over any private interests.</p>	<p>Stakeholders are not suspicious about others stakeholders' motives and able to collaborate among themselves. They have similar perceptions of policy outcomes, and they are not in conflict with one another.</p>		
<b>CAB officials</b>	<p>What roles do the different partners in the collaboration have?                      Which forms and combinations of management are 'best' regarding natural resources? Why?                      Do you employ partnerships as a model? If so, when?</p>	<b>Collaboration strategies</b>			
<b>Stakeholders (project leaders)</b>	<p>What do you collaborate about?                      How is the collaboration organized?                      How are decisions made?                      Which roles do the different actors (public and private) have?                      Have all actors had as much influence in the collaboration?</p>	<b>Confirmation</b>	<b>Facilitation</b>	<b>Consultation</b>	<b>Negotiation</b>
		<p>Situations where officers formulate a policy change and then let stakeholders confirm.</p>	<p>Situations where officers actively facilitate negotiation among stakeholders in order to reduce conflicts between them.</p>	<p>Situations where officers consult stakeholders before making their decisions</p>	<p>Situations where officers negotiate together with stakeholders.</p>

## Results

As mentioned, the Swedish mountain region consists of four counties, from north to south Norrbotten, Västerbotten, Jämtland, and Dalarna (see Figure 1). Most natural resource management issues fall under the competencies of the CABs. All of them except Dalarna manage Sami reindeer husbandry in addition to other natural resources issues such as fishing, hunting, and nature conservation. Most of the mountain area in Dalarna is protected, which means that the management of these areas is primarily undertaken within the nature conservation sector (Zachrisson 2004). Due to complex land use conflicts, the legal foundation for collaborative solutions has considerably strengthened in this region over the last decade and become more formalized in several natural resource management sectors (see Eckerberg *et al.* 2015 for an extensive overview).

### Collaboration strategies

The following sections detail collaborative governance of environmental management in the four mountain counties by categorizing different forms into collaboration strategies. The earlier material from 2004 is used where relevant to discuss changes that occurred between that date and 2014.

### Confirmation

There are very few examples of current confirmation strategies in the 2014 material. One officer in Jämtland mentions one example when the CAB had to make an urgent decision to designate an interim nature reserve due to the plundering of bird eggs. The officers then held a meeting in the village concerned to inform people about the background to the decision, and that calmed the situation. In Dalarna, confirmation has been a common strategy in nature conservation issues, which has led to severe distrust towards the CAB among local inhabitants, as well as from municipal politicians and stakeholders. One example of a process that in the end only increased distrust was the designation of Fulufjället National Park (Zachrisson 2009b). The officers involved describe it like this;

We [CAB officers] have been criticized over a long period of time, both by the local population and municipal politicians ... the criticism goes beyond the point that nature is over-protected ... then, work started to revise existing reserves ... in connection with that, there was a meeting but it was arranged in that classic way that agencies do [these things]. You go out, you present, you listen and then you go home, and write yourself ... it evoked gigantic resistance here.

In the 2004 material, officers in Norrbotten and Västerbotten employed the confirmation approach when adjusting fishing regulations; however, in contrast with the previous scenario described here, this was not a situation characterized by corrosive long-term distrust.

## Consultation

Consultation strategies dominate both in 2014 and 2004. This is perhaps not surprising as consultation is formally required in a number of situations before the CAB grants a permission or dispensation, in particular with the Sami RHCs (reindeer herding communities). In Dalarna, this concerns protected areas where the individuals applying (such as land owners or entrepreneurs working in tourism) often express distrust towards the CAB. CAB officers lead the legally required Nature Conservation Council (Prop. 2008/09:214), a forum in which interested individuals meet up to discuss general issues. Västerbotten has also instigated a similar council, whereas Jämtland and Norrbotten have opted not to introduce such a body. In Dalarna, Västerbotten (Vindelfjällen), and Norrbotten (Abisko), there are also consultation groups organized to consider specific protected areas in the mountain region; one example of this type of body is the Fulufjället Management Council. One stakeholder in the Council (interviewed as one of the project leaders) describes how local people have been promised employment by high-level officers which has not then materialized, causing great disappointment (see also Zachrisson 2009b); this stakeholder, does, however, still think that the Council is a good idea as all stakeholders are represented and are at least being heard.

Sami RHCs have been consulted regularly in all the counties, in Norrbotten and Jämtland on a formalized basis since a few years back when officers started to organize yearly conferences with the RHC presidents. The RHCs also receive a number of referrals [*remisser*] regarding issues such as land leases. In Jämtland, the officers work with the RHCs to empower them to get involved at an early stage in external – and potentially controversial – exploitation processes such as mineral exploration and the construction of windpower plants. CAB Västerbotten formally consults with RHCs through the Reindeer Herding Delegation (RHD). One officer describes it like this:

it is the governor who decides, so the RHD has gone from a decisive organ to a more consultative, collaborative organ where different issues and opinions are discussed... I think it works very well... when the RHD had decisive power there could be more difficulties, perhaps more so where there were different opinions that were difficult to break... it can be easier when you have a more reasoning, consultative, discussing role. [It is] Less locked...

In Norrbotten and Västerbotten, CAB officers have initiated and institutionalized consultation through yearly conferences on hunting. In Västerbotten, the aim has primarily been to avoid conflicts and build both official and social trust among the stakeholders involved. All relevant stakeholders – RHCs, hunting associations, municipalities, and other interest groups – participate. The CAB discusses the current situation, and plans for the next year. A CAB Västerbotten officer says:

it has been very positive to gather people, and we get that response from different sides too. Those who earlier had been critical now think that they get to know what really happens. That is an important

part – that you get the right information, and not rumors that might have changed along the way. Then you get to give your viewpoints. Of course not all opinions are taken into account; that would spread all sides and edges, but we reason and we can anchor [the decisions made]

In 2004, each CAB ran mandatory wildlife management boards and regional predator groups, all of which constituted consultation. Hunting management policies varied substantially between the four counties (Zachrisson 2004). The interviewed officers in all counties perceived that they were trusted by stakeholders, albeit reluctantly. However, levels of social trust were perceived as low. The officers described how stakeholder groups were in conflict with one another over hunting rights and practices (Zachrisson 2004), as well as disagreeing over carnivore numbers and management (see also Sandström and Lindvall 2006).

### **Facilitation**

Officers in Norrbotten and Västerbotten describe how they use facilitation as a collaboration strategy in situations when they are contacted by a stakeholder who does not trust another actor and where a conflict is unfolding. One officer at Norrbotten CAB explains:

... it can be a RHC that feels hard pressed. They feel that they have no dialogue with, for instance, Kalixfors firing range and the military. And the military finds it difficult to get in contact with the RHC. Then we can participate in their meetings during a five-year period and then it is often to achieve a dialogue. You talk the same language.

The officers usually organize a number of meetings where the actors can meet and discuss things; these meetings occur quite often in the start-up period, but then perhaps inevitably become more infrequent as time goes by. In 2004, officers in Norrbotten and Västerbotten also employed facilitation strategies to deal with conflicts among stakeholders in regards to hunting.

### **Negotiation**

The strategy of negotiation is, in 2014, well used, both formally (as required by law in several sectors) and informally, as a way to move forward in situations where there is severe distrust between stakeholders and the CAB. The situation regarding hunting described above (in 4.1.3) along with serious ongoing conflicts over carnivore management (Cinque 2008, Sandström and Lindvall 2006), has led to an institutionalization of negotiations of these issues through regional wildlife management delegations (WMDs). Since 2009, the WMDs have allocated hunting permits for the respective moose management areas, and regulated small game hunting and the management of large carnivores (SFS 2009:1474). WMDs are led by the CAB and comprise a wide set of actors: representatives of forest owners, hunting, environmental, tourism and outdoor

life organizations, as well as local politicians. In the reindeer herding areas (Norrbotten, Västerbotten, and Jämtland), the RHCs are also included.

According to officers in Västerbotten and Jämtland, the WMDs have more of a decisive mandate when it comes to some issues. One officer explains that “*decisions are made around a number of issues so there is a formal joint power, a joint decision space.*” The officers in Dalarna and Norrbotten seem to have a slightly different take on the matter:

... [it's like] there was a children's disease with the WMDs – 15 persons came in who thought they were going to decide everything. Because it was a little like that, it had been presented as if we were going to regionalize the carnivore and wildlife management and now the local influence should be increased. But ... we had to have a quite thorough process then to clarify that this is still part of the administration, and that means that we can only make decisions that follow Swedish legislation. Which of course took the edge off some of the engagement ... but it enabled better discussions. You have to know what room for maneuver there is. (Officer, Norrbotten)

However, the WMD had a tough start in Dalarna due to severe distrust both between the various stakeholders involved and between them and the CAB. Dalarna had had a top-down approach in the development of moose management plans that preceded the WMDs, despite the high levels of both official and social distrust that would have warranted a bottom-up negotiation strategy from the beginning. The most hotly debated issue concerns the carnivores (particularly wolves), where local people think that they have too little influence (Bjärstig *et al.* 2014).

The carnivore situation is also described as somewhat problematic in Jämtland, and this is despite the WMD according to the CAB officers. The number of carnivores is decided nationally, and the WMDs can only decide how to mitigate the effects of these decisions. The Sami RHCs disagree with the set number and therefore have little trust in the national carnivore policy, which in turn spills over into reduced trust towards the CAB that is charged with its implementation:

this is a [national] policy that makes it very difficult for the RHCs to feel any level of trust ... And that spills over to the CAB, so ... our trust is being nailed at the edge when they don't think that the policy is manageable... Since the RHCs perceive that they can't handle the carnivores, then they have little trust in us on that particular issue. (Officer, Jämtland)

The RHDs (existing in Jämtland, Västerbotten, and Norrbotten) are similar to the WMDs, but were mandated by legislation already in the 1970s (cf. Eckerberg *et al.* 2015). Just like the WMDs, the RHDs generate considerable work for the CABs: there are many meetings each year that are prepared by the CAB, and many representatives to communicate with. The role of the RHD must be

characterized as negotiation in Norrbotten, while in Västerbotten it has more of a consultative character:

It is participation in a completely different way than if we sat by ourselves in our rooms and made these decisions ... it is very valuable when [representatives from] industry and politics can enter these decisions, so in that way we get very good insight into the area... I know that the RHD is used differently in the different counties, but here it takes many of the CAB's decisions. The RHD should deal principally with important issues regarding the Reindeer Herding Act. (Officer, Norrbotten)

In Dalarna, there are ongoing negotiations regarding nature conservation issues, a sector where the CAB officers have traditionally employed confirmation strategies (as described in 4.1.1) which led to chronic distrust. In order to move forward, a dialogue process with a professional facilitator started around the Drevfjället nature reserve. Local interests demanded that the CAB development unit should also take part, and so they did. This evolved into negotiations in several working groups where nature conservation was connected to the larger issue of rural development. On certain issues, such as snowmobiling, there was giving and taking on the part of the different actors, so that free snowmobiling is now allowed in some areas, as requested by local people and entrepreneurs, while there are some areas where it is prohibited, as the CAB wanted. Two of the interviewed project leaders confirmed the perception of this process as quite successful in building trust and finding concrete solutions, but both of them still show a certain degree of distrust against the CAB:

we saw for a while that they [the CAB officers] were afraid that we wanted to take the jobs of certain individuals at the CAB, but it was not that at all – we wanted to facilitate doing things that you could not do with existing resources. (Project leader, Dalarna)

The CAB officers expressed the view that the negotiation mode has become important in their nature conservation work, but that does not mean that they think that stakeholders and/or local organizations should be given the overall responsibility:

It has been 'well, the management we can run all by ourselves', so we've had good reason to find out what the politicians actually mean by 'local management'. When I talked to the person who wrote it [the national proposition]... they talked about increasing local participation ... and when they write local management, they write about creating employment for local entrepreneurs... we understand this mission as working for increased local participation... I can describe it as very resource demanding in the short run but I think that we win so much more in the long run... [but] we don't let go of our role as an authority. (Officer, Dalarna)

Norrbottnen and Jämtland have experienced similar developments in mountain nature conservation issues. Jämtland includes the designation of what would be the largest national park in Sweden, encompassing Vålådalen, Sylarna, and Helags, while in Norrbotten the CAB engaged in the creation of a management plan for the Laponia World Heritage Site. The latter example is instructive: in a situation of severe distrust between stakeholders and between them and the CAB, the CAB initiated multi-stakeholder negotiations in several parallel working groups in the mid-2000s (Zachrisson 2009a), resulting in the most advanced collaborative governance arrangement in nature conservation in Sweden (Hongslo et al. 2016). Laponia is managed by a non-profit association, allowing for a range of stakeholders to participate in consensus-based decision-making (Reimerson 2015). This kind of negotiation strategy is perceived as very demanding by the officers, and it has, for instance, precluded the CAB from setting up a regional consultative group (which is supposed to be mandatory):

... I mean that now Laponiatjuottjudus has only had the management task for one year [at the time of the interview], approximately, but it has worked very well. But it is expensive. It really costs a lot. We could not afford a Laponia management organization for all the protected areas in the mountain range – it would not hold economically. (Officer, Norrbotten)

In Västerbotten and Jämtland, CAB officers have participated actively in negotiation processes with local actors, in particular Sami RHCs, but with a broader focus including hunting, fishing, and local development more generally. Both of the Jämtland CAB officers interviewed in 2014 stress the importance of pursuing strategies to create co-management structures where the CAB, local inhabitants, RHCs, and other business interests (such as tourism entrepreneurs) work proactively to achieve rural development:

We have run a project called ‘Local Management’, where we’ve looked at an area ... the Frostviken villages – three RHCs. We want them to take more responsibility for the mountain management, to create co-management with authorities and the residents, not just the RHCs but also tourism entrepreneurs and ... to be part of regional development ... fishing, tourism, hunting tourism, it must be possible to develop this without us handling it. When it comes to hunting there has to be legislative change to enable it, but when it comes to fishing we can – even with the present legislation – give greater opportunities... (Officer, Jämtland)

One of the project leaders in Jämtland has a central coordinating role in this work and confirms the positive ambitions of the CAB:

I think that we have a good relationship [with the CAB]. But with these mountain issues, it involves many units. And the CAB sees the benefit [of collaboration]; I have been up and talked for different

units at the same time to describe the situation... It is easy when they sit with their mandate that they interpret that it gets a bit silo orientated...

The officers in Västerbotten also express similar ambitions. One of them emphasised that through pooling the collective resources of different stakeholders they can work more effectively:

... we can sit down together and think about what we can do with common resources. We can't ... if it is something special you [a stakeholder] want to do at this [snowmobile] track, you have to prepare it yourself... But we can perhaps with other resources make a wind shelter when you get up there, because that can benefit the nature reserve visitors, the tracks and so on... Because we know about it, then when we sit with our resources and do things ... we can always allocate them to something in particular.

CAB officers in Jämtland and Västerbotten thus often initiate, encourage, and lead negotiations where the CAB finances meeting costs, adjusts regulations, and works out agreements. Tåssåsen (Sandström 2009) and Ammarnäs (Zachrisson 2004) were two such cases mentioned in 2004. Following disagreement, small game hunting regulations were considered at length, resulting in the transfer of management responsibilities for this aspect of hunting to the RHC in Tåssåsen.

## Discussion

The first question this paper posed concerned when public officers choose to lead collaborations. The results firmly show that distrust and conflict are the most important reasons for the interviewed officers deciding to initiate collaboration, often in situations where they have previously relied on top-down confirmation strategies. In the most conflict-ridden sectors, such as wildlife and carnivore management, the state has intervened and instigated mandatory negotiations (see also Eckerberg *et al.* 2015). We found that support for the other explanations proffered by Koontz *et al.* (2005) and Scott and Thomas (2017) is much weaker. Indeed, we see no support for Koontz *et al.*'s suggestion that collaboration is an alternative to imposing standards, and suggest rather that officers use collaboration in order to succeed with imposing standards that have already been set. Scott and Thomas's propositions that external funding and existing institutions are important are not confirmed either, but their notion that a central network position is important does get some support. According to Scott and Thomas, the officers should occupy this position in order to engage as a convener, but here we see that *other actors* can play that coordinating role as well (as shown by the example of Jämtland).

The second question under review was about which collaborative tools or strategies public officers choose when they lead. Earlier research is very underdeveloped regarding this point, although Focht and colleagues' framework on how perceptions of trust levels should decide which strategy to employ is a novel attempt to move forward. The officers in the Swedish mountain region

employ all four collaboration strategies. Confirmation is now the least common strategy, since this study shows that all sectors that belong to environmental management in the mountains are characterized by official distrust (though of different levels of magnitude). Facilitation is used in some counties to handle social distrust, especially when there are conflicts unfolding between different stakeholders. It is described as working well, but there is not much emphasis on this in the interviews. When described in general terms, the mountain CABs have moved towards more intensive and costly collaboration, primarily in the forms of consultation and negotiation, which has had positive results in terms of more trust towards the CAB, fewer conflicts, and greater acceptance for management decisions. This result supports the Focht and colleagues' framework.

However, despite similarities at the general level, there are also significant differences that point towards the importance of factors other than trust. First of all, consultation is not only employed in situations with official distrust but also when there is significant social distrust. This is the case in Västerbotten and Norrbotten where yearly hunting conferences serve both to handle conflicts among stakeholders and to let them make their voices heard to the CABs. It is also valid for the nature conservation councils, which were instigated to provide consultative regional fora despite a certain degree of social distrust in both Dalarna and Västerbotten.

Second, consultation is also used as an additional strategy to complement negotiation. Both Västerbotten and Norrbotten have developed and institutionalized considerable consultation strategies in regards to hunting alongside negotiations in the WMDs. Overall, this seems to have created more trust and better policy implementation as compared with 2004, a change that is in line with the predictions of Focht and colleagues. But why are the consultative elements needed then? The question evokes the important issue of representation and how well it works. The WMDs are representative fora where different actor groups are granted a seat. However, there might be voices which are not heard, and the representatives and their organizations which are present might not have efficient channels for their own internal communication. Participation was in consequence broadened in 2017, with environmental NGOs given an additional seat, and ecotourism businesses included (Ministry of Environment and Energy 2017). The additional yearly conferences, that are open to anyone, can enable more efficient communication transfer. In Dalarna and Jämtland, the WMDs are not combined with consultation in the same way, and the officers signal that there is still public distrust, primarily related to the carnivore issue.

Third, the work being done in the RHDs belongs to a different order of collaboration strategies despite the fact that these bodies are mandatory; Norrbotten employs its RHD for negotiation while Västerbotten uses its RHD for consultation. According to the theory, it should follow that there is more distrust between the RHCs in Norrbotten than in Västerbotten, which is a plausible hypothesis since there are more RHCs – and of different, more complex types – in Norrbotten.

Fourth, and last, only Jämtland and Västerbotten employ negotiation strategies to experiment with local management to achieve regional development. In some of these cases, negotiation is used while there is no

apparent social distrust. The issue of development is, however, very complex in these peripheral communities, and intensive forms of collaboration are probably needed to infuse engagement with the necessary energy. The comparison with the other two counties, where these kinds of approaches do not exist, suggests that there are two important dimensions to explain when officers lead local management. The first concerns how officers interpret the room for maneuver which their mandate offers. In the proactive counties of Jämtland and Västerbotten, the officers perceive a greater room for maneuver – they see that there is room to experiment with devolution of certain well-defined tasks. Secondly, the lead officers in these counties have a much more integrated view of environmental management as embedded in society, so that a certain degree of development is necessary to achieve acceptance. They also see local actors as having important resources to be employed in development work.

To summarize then, trust is apparently an important dimension in deciding collaboration strategies, but this study suggests that official trust is much more central than social trust. Consultation may be employed even if there is some social distrust, but only if official trust is not too low because then negotiation is necessary as shown by the case of Dalarna. In these circumstances, the Focht and colleagues' framework is not clear over what the difference between the strategies actually is. One difference is in contact intensity, as the CABs' work with consultation appears less time-consuming than that of negotiation. Another difference is in the degree of decision-making influence that different stakeholders are granted. Negotiations seem to be about making compromises and giving stakeholders more of an equal partner status. Often the mandate decides the degree of influence that is possible, and thus when negotiation is formally possible. The degree of intensity thus dictates how costly a strategy is in terms of money and/or time, while the degree of influence determines how costly it is in terms of ensuring that the outcome corresponds to official (or policy) goals. How officers perceive their mandate has implications for the latter: the more room for interpretation that they see, the more influence they can give to stakeholders. However, if the legislation leaves very little room for maneuver, then not even negotiations can be expected to improve official trust. This is shown by the carnivore issue in Jämtland and Dalarna, where official distrust prevails, despite a formal set-up of negotiations, since the policy output still is too far from the preferences of the stakeholders.

## Conclusions

Focht and Trachtenberg's (2005) typology of collaboration strategies proved to be useful in our examination and analysis of when and why public officers choose to lead collaborative governance processes and what collaboration strategies they apply in practice. Our study confirms that the design of collaboration strategies should be informed by an appreciation of trust levels, as conflicts are a major driver and since different strategies do influence the success rate. Public officers seem able to rather correctly estimate both levels of official and social trust among stakeholders, as their accounts were validated by stakeholders in the different counties. Where public officers choose collaboration strategies that match trust perceptions among stakeholders, the results tend to be better – policy goals are then implemented to a greater extent.

But there is an obvious need to revise the rather dominating but simple view that more trust unequivocally translates into more participation. When it concerns official management of ‘wicked issues’ such as hunting, fishing, and nature conservation, this study supports the view that lack of trust in public officers drives the stakeholders’ wish to collaborate – official distrust is key.

We see that the various collaboration strategies employed are not mutually exclusive but complementary: officers employ several strategies at the same time. However, estimations of trust levels only partially influence which collaboration strategies public officers select. The decision of strategy choice is also dependent on other factors, such as how much discretion the officers perceive that they have – how they interpret the legislation and their mission. This dimension is not included in the framework drawn up by Focht and colleagues, but is instead addressed by Koontz *et al.* (2005) as well as Scott and Thomas (2017). Mandates can constrain the efforts of public officers according to Koontz *et al.* (2005), when they act as followers and not leaders. Scott and Thomas (2017) agree as they argue that officers are more likely to take on the role of follower when the issue area of the collaborative process overlaps with their own agenda. The work to understand the role of public officers in collaborative governance apparently needs to be further developed, with an emphasis both on trust perceptions and mandates in the selection of collaboration strategy.

This study shows that there is an increased emphasis on resource-intensive and mandate-challenging collaboration with different stakeholders in a context characterized by ‘wicked problems’. It is therefore important to further examine environmental officers’ deliberative skills and collaboration strategies, since leading environmental officers nowadays have more daily face-to-face contact with stakeholders, taking on the role of ‘street-level bureaucrats’ in a move towards transformational public leadership (Cinque 2015, Orazi *et al.* 2013, Sevä and Jagers 2013, Lipsky 2010). Still, collaboration is not a panacea, but rather a viable option when dealing with ‘wicked problems’ where leading officers have well-founded perceptions of pre-collaboration trust and their mandate in relation to policy goals.

## Acknowledgments

The research was funded by the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency as part of their research program *Storslagna fjäll* (Magnificent Mountains: [www.storslagnafjall.se](http://www.storslagnafjall.se)). We are grateful to research assistants Annika Nordenstam for her insightful compilation of considerable research material and to Sabrina Dressel who designed the map in Figure 1. We also wish to thank the participants at the Swedish Political Science Association (SWEPSA), Panel of Environmental Politics, for their valuable inputs on an earlier draft of this paper.

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## Appendix 1

Interviews conducted with key officers in 2004 and 2014:  
Title/affiliation at the CAB, interview format, date of the interview.

### **Norrbottnen Country Administrative Board**

1. County Fishing Counsellor/Advisor, personal interview, 2004-03-29
2. Fish Biologist, personal interview, 2004-03-29
3. and 4. Director, Division of Hunting/Reindeer Husbandry, personal interview, 2004-03-29 and telephone interview, 2014-02-13
5. Officer, Division of Hunting/Reindeer Husbandry, personal interview, 2004-03-29
6. Officer, Division of Hunting/Reindeer Husbandry, e-mail (2004, n.d.)
7. Director, Division of Environment, telephone interview, 2014-03-06

### **Västerbotten Country Administrative Board**

8. Mountain Management Director, Division of Natural Resources, personal interview, 2004-03-02
9. Division of Nature Protection, telephone interview, 2014-02-21
10. Director, Division of Nature Protection, telephone interview, 2014-03-11
11. County Fishing Counsellor/Advisor, Division of Natural Resources, personal interview, 2004-03-02

### **Jämtland County Administrative Board**

12. Reindeer Husbandry Director, Division of Reindeer Husbandry including Mountain Fishing and Hunting, e-mail (2004, n.d.)
13. Director, Division of Nature Protection, telephone interview, 2014-02-14
14. Administrator, Division of Reindeer Husbandry including Mountain Fishing and Hunting, personal interview, 2004-03-15
15. Mountain Management Expert, Division of Nature Protection, telephone interview, 2014-03-11
16. County Fishing Counsellor/Advisor, Division of Reindeer Husbandry including Mountain Fishing and Hunting, personal interview, 2004-03-15
17. Officer, Division of Reindeer Husbandry including Mountain Fishing and Hunting, personal interview, 2004-03-15

### **Dalarna County Administrative Board**

18. Environmental Protection Director, Division of Nature Protection, telephone interview, 2014-03-12
19. Coordinator, Division of Nature Protection, telephone interview, 2014-02-07
20. Function Coordinator, Division of Nature Protection, telephone interview, 2004-03-02

## **Appendix 2**

Interviews conducted with project leaders in 2014, 2015 and 2016

Project title, project type/funding form (if any), interview format, date of the interview

### **Norrbotten**

1. Flora i Pite Lappmark, LONA, telephone interview, 2015-03-05
2. Projekt Livsmiljöförbättrande åtgärder i Lule Älv, telephone interview, 2014-11-11
3. Sevärt i Lappland – Arjeplog, LEADER, telephone interview, 2015-12-04
4. Hållbar destinationsutveckling, telephone interview, 2015-03-03
5. Leipipir modellskog, telephone interview, 2015-03-13
6. COOPENERGY, telephone interview, 2015-03-04
7. Fisketurismutveckling, LEADER, telephone interview 2014-11-12

### **Västerbotten**

8. Vandringsturism i Vindelfjällen, Landsbygdsprojekt, telephone interview, 2015-10-29
9. Friluftsliv i Ammarnäs, LONA, written answers, 2015-10-19
10. Förstudie Fisketurism Från Kust Till Fjäll, Vindeln Kommun LB-fisk, telephone interview, 2014-11-07
11. Vilhelmina Model Forest, face-to-face interview/pilot, 2014-12-17
12. Skikkisjön, LONA, telephone interview, 2014-11-06
13. Vindel River Life, LIFE, telephone interview, 2014-11-11
14. Regionala Landskapsstrategier, telephone interview, 2015-03-06
15. Sevärt Lappland i Sorsele kommun, LEADER, telephone interview, 2015-05-22
16. Fiske i Södra Lappland, LEADER, face-to-face interview, 2015-10-09
17. Ammarnäsöring – del 2, telephone interview, 2016-02-01
18. Naturvårdsprogram för Dorotea kommun, LONA, telephone interview, 2016-03-01

### **Jämtland**

19. Skoterprojekt/Projekt spår och leder, EU-finansierat destinationsprojekt, telephone interview, 2015-05-05
20. Högforsleden, LEADER, verksamhetsutvecklare, telephone interview, 2015-05-05

21. Vindkraftspark Middagsfjället, telephone interview, 2015-04-29
22. Renens rike, telephone interview, 2015-05-11
23. Skoterled Börtnan, LEADER, telephone interview, 2015-04-27
24. Fåglar i Västjämtland, LONA, telephone interview, 2015-04-27
25. GAALTIJE – motor i den samiska turismutvecklingen, telephone interview, 2015-10-23
26. Årevandring, LEADER, telephone interview, 2016-01-27
27. Hällingsåfallet Strömsund, LONA, telephone interview, 2016-01-29
28. Fettjeåfallet, LONA, telephone interview, 2016-02-04
29. Vindkraftcentrum.se – Kraften från och för Jämtland, telephone interview, 2016-02-08
30. Utveckling av vandringsleder i Ansättfjällen, LONA, telephone interview, 2016-02-05
31. Natur och vandringsstig i Näsviken, LONA, telephone interview, 2016-03-14
32. Sörbodaprojektet, LEADER, telephone interview, 2016-03-09

### **Dalarna**

33. Förstudie samverkan kring lokal förvaltning och dialog för naturvården i Södra Fjällen, telephone interview, 2015-06-23
34. Lokal hållbar förvaltning av fjällområden, telephone interview, 2015-05-07
35. SOND Säkerhet och verksamhetsutvecklande skoterledsbro, telephone interview, 2015-10-19
36. Dialogprojekt Revidering av skötselplan för Drevfjället “Naturreservat i fjällen i Älvdalens kommun, revidering av beslut och skötselplaner, pilotstudie Drervjällen”, telephone interview, 2015-05-06
37. Förstudie Grövelsjöfjällen, LEADER, written answers, 2015-09-28
38. Fulufjällets skötselråd, telephone interview, 2015-05-12
39. Fiske-, natur- och kulturstig i Rörbäcksnäs, LEADER, telephone interview, 2015-10-19.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Other publications derived from the project concern the context of collaborative governance (Eckerberg et al. 2015) and the difficulties associated with assessing the performance of collaborative governance (Bjärstig 2017).