



Research

Trade-offs in the implementation of good practice in large carnivore conservation and management

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ABSTRACT. Challenges related to increasing large carnivore populations in Europe led to the establishment of the EU Platform on Coexistence between People and Large Carnivores. We present the work undertaken by the Secretariat of the Platform in analyzing case studies in large carnivore conservation and management, which reflected good practice. We focused on 10 case studies ranging from concrete damage prevention methods to broader stakeholder involvement. For these cases, we interviewed stakeholder members with direct involvement. The short listing of case studies was based on the good practice they demonstrated in terms of both conservation and positive outcomes for stakeholder interaction. Our analysis showed that we have much to learn from the unplanned side effects of the actions undertaken, which stakeholders negotiated as part of the process of working together (further referred to as "trade-offs"). We examined how stakeholders dealt with these trade-offs and how they might lead to adaptations in their future interactions. Stakeholders' responses focused in particular on the following areas: institutional backing of damage prevention and/or compensation; intergroup and in-group relations between stakeholders; instances where costs outweighed benefits; and threats posed by large carnivores. Our findings suggest a need to reconsider what we mean by good practice. In particular, "win-win" solutions may not be realistic, nor even desirable as a management goal. An overconcentration on win-win options may lead to a downplaying of the costs for particular stakeholder groups, which in the end is likely to be counterproductive. Our results indicate that good practice should not be understood as meaning an absence of obstacles but that such obstacles are effectively overcome by stakeholders to achieve desirable outcomes in a specific setting. This conceptualization of good practice has considerable implications for stakeholder engagement in participatory processes and may promote social learning.

Key Words: *EU Platform; good practice; large carnivores; stakeholder engagement; trade-offs*

INTRODUCTION

In the last decades, many large carnivore populations in Europe have expanded in both size and range (Chapron et al. 2014). The recovery of four species of large carnivores (brown bear, *Ursus arctos*; gray wolf, *Canis lupus*; Eurasian lynx, *Lynx lynx*; and wolverine, *Gulo gulo*) has been welcomed as a conservation success story, but at the same time, it has led to increased conflicts. One of the most prominent and widely promoted means to address such conflicts has been to increase stakeholder participation in the decision-making process (e.g., Young et al. 2013). Stakeholder consultation and involvement have been applied to large carnivore conservation and management in very different geographical settings (Redpath et al. 2017).

The EU Platform on Coexistence between People and Large Carnivores (European Commission 2014a) was established in 2014 to bring together stakeholder representative bodies on the European level, with the aim to discuss and share good practice in large carnivore conservation and management, providing the members with the necessary information to diffuse this to their membership at the national and regional level. The platform is supported by a European Commission-funded secretariat, which had as one of its first tasks to examine case studies reflecting good practice. These were defined as examples of implementing tested solutions for mitigating human-carnivore conflict in which different stakeholder groups worked together to have a positive impact on large carnivore conservation and management, reduce tension between stakeholders, and increase understanding of one another's positions. In establishing and carrying out this task, a main assumption was that good practice can be transferable from one geographic location to another.

Transfer of good practice may be quite challenging, however. Even if measures may reach their aims on a purely technical level, considering the socioeconomic setting is crucial. Engagement between stakeholders does not take place in a vacuum but is affected by ongoing social interactions. Prior relationships between stakeholder groups, positive or negative feelings, and trust or lack of it must be carefully considered. All these parameters may present challenges for establishing participatory processes (Young et al. 2013). Another difficulty, when engaging representatives of a particular stakeholder group, is whether they are able to transmit the agreements made to the rest of their group not involved in the core activities. The background assumption is that gradually, all members of a particular group will become aware of developments in participatory processes and exchange viewpoints with spokespersons having a clear mandate of how to position themselves. Whether this exchange actually occurs will depend on the homogeneity of each stakeholder group but also on in-group relations (Salvatori et al. 2020). In addition, developing and maintaining good relationships between stakeholders involved in large carnivore management cannot be considered as fixed or final at any point in time. Feelings of trust may be impacted by external events, and this may derail initially successful participatory processes. On the other hand, tension between stakeholders may prove beneficial to their collaboration, for instance, if stakeholders find that their viewpoints converge on topics not fully explored previously. This may lead to evolution in their positioning and change in their identity (e.g., Fougère and Solitander 2020). Social relations between stakeholders are constantly evolving, and participatory processes need to be adaptable in response to these developments.

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The concept of voicing and working out trade-offs within participatory processes is part of this adaptive process. Trade-offs are used to describe the unplanned consequences of a particular intervention, which parties have needed to address, or accept, or further negotiate when working toward a joint (planned) outcome (e.g., Galafassi et al. 2017). Many consequences of the implementation of good practice in large carnivore conservation and management can be anticipated. There are also predictable preexisting external and internal factors influencing stakeholder interaction, which should be explored in advance through stakeholder analysis or a process of mapping stakeholder conflict (Redpath et al. 2013). However, we refer to a specific type of trade-offs emerging during stakeholder collaboration for implementing good practice in large carnivore conservation and management. These trade-offs can be understood and explored by stakeholders only after the collaborative process has started. Unanticipated side effects have considerable implications for the distribution of costs and benefits among affected actors. In addition, acknowledgment of these types of implementation-bound trade-offs may lead stakeholders to reframe and reinterpret several other aspects of human-carnivore or human-human relations. When not adequately considered, such trade-offs may compromise the desired outcomes of any planned intervention. However, if stakeholders are allowed to consider them properly in their deliberations, they can fuel innovation and change for future participatory actions.

We consider the idea of negotiating trade-offs as an alternative to win-lose (in which one group can only win at their rival's expense) or win-win (in which all groups reach their aims) scenarios. Redpath et al. (2013) have described trade-offs as a solution to conflict management, which is suboptimal but more realistic to reach when compared to win-win approaches (see also McShane et al. 2011, Muradian et al. 2013, Galafassi et al. 2017, and Pooley et al. 2017). Considering how stakeholders deal with trade-offs allows a more nuanced representation of why and how they might balance interests. This may also act as a practical tool for identifying existent but not yet properly weighed costs and examining the actions that can be taken for them to seem more palatable to stakeholders, for example, by balancing them with other potential advantages.

METHODS

The secretariat of the EU platform concentrated on specific case studies in large carnivore conservation and management, which reflected good practice. This started as an extensive and non-selective sampling based on expert input with a broad consideration for each case study of socioeconomic outcomes for local stakeholders' collaboration between key stakeholders involved and sustainability of the actions undertaken. Expert input was sought from platform members, experts in the large carnivore initiative for Europe, and invited speakers at platform events. A longlist of 35 case studies was compiled (European Commission 2014b), and this was then subjected to a second expert evaluation. This involved rating case studies across a more detailed set of binary variables related to the same three criteria presented above: (1) socioeconomic outcomes, e.g., if damage caused by large carnivores decreased or not; (2) stakeholder collaboration, e.g., if collaboration among stakeholders was fostered or not; and (3) sustainability of actions, e.g., if there were follow-up actions after the initial funding or timeline of the

initiative ended or not. Each case study was scored by at least two expert reviewers using the same set of binary items, and then case studies were shortlisted according to the accumulative score of matches between reviewers. Ten case studies were selected among the ones with the highest total score, after weighting for geographical location (Mediterranean, Balkan, Central European and Nordic dimension) and large carnivore species (wolf, bear, lynx, and wolverine). See Table 1 for a brief description and the coding name of each case study, and for a comprehensive presentation of all 10 case studies see European Commission 2014c. A group of case studies focused on livestock (damage prevention and/or compensation, GR LGDs, GR RDP, IT MEDWOLF, SIRDP, SE CPPs, and FR PASTORALOU) while a second group focused more broadly on stakeholder interaction processes around large carnivores (DE BADEN, ES CANTABRIAN, CH CORE, and FI TASSU).

For each one of the 10 case studies in the shortlist, a thorough document analysis of scientific and gray literature was first undertaken. Purposive snowball sampling was used to identify at least three potential interviewees for each case study. Interviewees were sought among stakeholder groups with a comprehensive experience gained through their direct involvement at the local level. Semi-structured interviews were conducted by national experts commissioned for that purpose, in the mother tongue of the interviewees, after they provided their informed consent. Interviewees were briefed on the aim of the EU platform and on the research undertaken by the secretariat. They were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to stop the interview or discontinue participation and withdraw from the research at any time. Interviewees were also informed on data collection, storage and analysis, and they were guaranteed anonymity. A total of 34 interviews were conducted. Interviewees covered equally the entire array of stakeholders engaged, namely, local producers, e.g., farmers, stock breeders, beekeepers; authorities, e.g., federal and local governments, managing authorities of protected areas, state actors; representatives of hunters' associations; and representatives of environmental, non-governmental organizations (eNGOs). The focus of the interviews was on the activities implemented and lessons learned and, interviewees were prompted to critically reflect on their experiences in terms of the processes followed and outcomes achieved.

Our data analysis focused on a specific type of trade-off described by all interviewees, which was explicitly related to the implementation of good practice in large carnivore conservation and management. These implementation-bound trade-offs were realized by stakeholders during the process of working together toward a planned goal (e.g., Galafassi et al. 2017). They were portrayed by interviewees as unplanned side effects with the intention to negotiate them further. These trade-offs were singled out from the interview transcripts and analyzed by means of open coding (Strauss and Corbin 1990). After repeated readings of the entire corpus, the first author performed a preliminary elaboration of coding categories. Inter-rater reliability between two independent coders reached over 85% and unresolved cases were settled through a concluding discussion. Only trade-offs mentioned by five or more different interviewees were included. They related to the following topics: (1) institutional backing of damage prevention and/or compensation; (2) intergroup relations

Table 1. Case studies depicting good practice in large carnivore conservation and management

Title (case study coding name) [†]	Member state (code)	Brief description (dates)
1. Network of livestock guarding dogs (LGDs; GR LGDs)	Greece (GR)	A network of owners of LGDs was created facilitating coordination and the exchange of puppies and adult dogs between livestock breeders (2009-2012)
2. Damage prevention under the Greek rural development program (RDP; GR RDP)	Greece (GR)	Installation of electric fences around apiaries and sheepfolds for minimizing damages caused by bears (2004-2013)
3. Livestock protection measures through LIFE Medwolf (IT MEDWOLF)	Italy (IT)	LIFE-project encouraging collaboration between provincial administration, environmental NGOs, and professional agricultural associations in implementing livestock protection measures (2012-2017)
4. Practical support under the Slovenian RDP (SI RDP)	Slovenia (SI)	Payment per hectare of grassland with top-ups depending on a range of protection measures adopted (LGDs, shepherd, electric fences; 2004-ongoing)
5. Conservation performance payments (CPPs; SE CPPs)	Sweden (SE)	The Swedish government replaced compensation payments with CPPs, paying reindeer herders for the number of successfully breeding wolverines in their area (1996-ongoing)
6. PastoraLoup volunteer program for shepherding (FR PASTORALOU)	France (FR)	Recruiting volunteers to support flock protection in rural communities during the night, in high altitude grazing meadows, where the risk of wolf attacks is high (1998-ongoing)
7. Transfer and communication project, Baden-Württemberg (DE BADEN)	Germany (DE)	Management of conflicts about large carnivores and development of sound solutions to these conflicts, mainly by enlarging the awareness on conflict dynamics among the conflict parties through mediated discussions (2012-2017)
8. Cooperation of stakeholders in the Cantabrian Mountains (ES CANTABRIAN)	Spain (ES)	A project promoting stakeholder deliberation and joint action for human-bear coexistence (1993-2015)
9. Core group wolf (CH CORE)	Switzerland (CH)	Cantonal wolf groups established in several Swiss cantons to facilitate stakeholder deliberation and joint action (2006-ongoing)
10. TASSU-system and voluntary-based large carnivore contact network (FI TASSU)	Finland (FI)	Electronic database that tracks presence of large carnivores, based on the input from volunteers who are trained by state agencies (1978-ongoing)

[†] Selection of case studies was performed by the Secretariat of the EU Platform on Coexistence between People and Large Carnivores.

between stakeholders; (3) in-group relations within stakeholder groups; (4) instances when costs outweighed benefits; and (5) threat from large carnivores. For each category of trade-offs, we examined if interviewees referred to formal or informal institutions. North (1990) defined institutions as setting the rules for social behavior that guides social interaction. Formal institutions are delineated by law and enforced by competent authorities to either reward compliant or excelling behavior as well as sanction non-compliant behavior. Informal institutions are unwritten regulations and social norms that determine social interaction between individuals and social actors. Tracing references of interviewees to formal and informal institutions provides insight as to the possible causes of trade-offs and to potential suggestions of how to confront them. As a final step, we drafted recommendations on how to better understand and use information on trade-offs during stakeholder engagement processes.

RESULTS

Institutional backing of damage prevention and/or compensation

The largest number of trade-offs was highlighted in interviews related to the institutional backing of damage prevention and/or compensation (Tables 2 and 3). Local producers (GR RDP, IT MEDWOLF, SI RDP, and SE CPPs) highlighted weaknesses in implementation. One example was the incentives applied for the conservation performance payments in Sweden (SE CPPs) in which, payments were based on the number of successful wolverine young. Damages did not necessarily correspond to the number of young and weather conditions (snow) may have led to an underestimation of reproductions. There were also calls by local producers and members of eNGOs for better integrating different measures applied (GR LGDs, GR RDP, SI RDP, and

SE CPPs). If measures were not uniformly implemented in a particular region, damage caused by large carnivores might be concentrated on a small number of producers who had not put protection measures in place. Additionally, the effective implementation of damage prevention measures might redirect large carnivores to new areas, including human settlements with potential for greater conflict. Gaps in funding between program periods, or after the initial funding for measures expired, were also highlighted by local producers and members of eNGOs (GR LGDs, GR RDP, IT MEDWOLF, and FR PASTORLOUP). The same stakeholder groups and authorities/state actors noted that eligibility of beneficiaries for the rural development programs needed to be clearer in future calls and outreach more effective so that available funds do not remain underutilized (GR RDP and SI RDP). Another inconsistency was that compensation measures were available (in Greece) even in the case in which damage prevention measures had not been previously used.

Intergroup relations between stakeholders

Although the former examples were confined to damage prevention and/or compensation and targeted formal institutions only, trade-offs related to intergroup relations between stakeholders were widely distributed among case studies and involved both formal and informal institutions (Tables 2 and 3). Interviewees noted the direct tension that emerged between stakeholders because of outright disagreement of a considerable percentage of local producers with how formal procedures were to be implemented (SE CPPs) and their inconvenient setup (FR PASTORLOUP, problematic relationships of volunteer shepherds with stock breeders; CH CORE, power imbalance because of unfair representation of interests). Members of eNGOs and authorities/state actors in the German (DE BADEN) and Swiss case studies (CH CORE) noted that intergroup tension

Table 2. Categories of trade-offs identified across case studies

Case studies [†]	Institutional backing of damage prevention and/or compensation	Intergroup relations between stakeholders	In-group relations within stakeholder groups	Costs outweigh benefits	Threat from large carnivores
1. GR LGDs	X		X		
2. GR RDP	X			X	
3. IT MEDWOLF	X	X	X	X	
4. SI RDP	X	X		X	
5. SE CPPs	X	X	X	X	
6. FR PASTORALLOUP	X	X	X	X	
7. DE BADEN		X	X	X	
8. ES CANTABRIAN		X		X	X
9. CH CORE		X	X		X
10. FI TASSU		X		X	X

[†] GR LGDs: Network of livestock guarding dogs (LGDs); GR RDP: Damage prevention under the Greek rural development program (RDP); IT MEDWOLF: Livestock protection measures through LIFE Medwolf; SI RDP: Practical support under the Slovenian RDP; SE CPPs: Conservation performance payments (CPPs); FR PASTORALLOUP: PastoraLoup volunteer program for shepherding; DE BADEN: Transfer and communication project, Baden-Württemberg; ES CANTABRIAN: Cooperation of stakeholders in the Cantabrian Mountains; CH CORE: Core group wolf; FI TASSU: TASSU-system and voluntary-based large carnivore contact network.

may be fueled by media discourse, and that they expected increasing large carnivore numbers to lead to tension with recreationists. Authorities/state actors in the Finnish case study (FI TASSU) highlighted the benefit seeking competitive behavior exemplified by some stakeholders, specifically when they were not willing to share data with all groups. Moreover, tension between stakeholder groups could emerge when some groups would endorse proposed changes to current practice, and other groups would be reluctant to consider such changes (DE BADEN, ES CANTABRIAN, CH CORE, and FI TASSU). In some cases, stakeholders were disappointed by lack of attention from external institutions, e.g., regional authorities paying little attention to stakeholder cooperation and agreement at the local level (IT MEDWOLF, SI RDP, and FI TASSU).

In-group relations within stakeholder group

Although trade-offs related to in-group relations within stakeholder groups were less often referred to in the interviews, they can also have important implications. For instance, the German (DE BADEN) and Swiss case studies (CH CORE) described problems disseminating the outcomes of stakeholder deliberation to in-group members. Thus, stakeholder members not directly involved in deliberations were reluctant to accept the agreements reached. A mechanism of in-group pressure was portrayed by local producers in the Swiss (CH CORE) and Italian case studies (IT MEDWOLF) in which, participants in stakeholder dialogue processes or implementers of damage-prevention methods were blamed by other members of their group for having conceded to rival (environmentalist) positions. This attitude reflected a kind of “black sheep” stigma in which, cooperative behavior was heavily criticized as deviating from in-group interests. Likewise, French stock breeders participating in the PastoraLoup Volunteer Program for shepherding (FR PASTORALLOUP) were believed to be too few in number to counterweigh the in-group pressure stemming from the majority of their colleagues with pronounced anti-carnivore sentiments. Other references described free-riding behavior (SE CPPs; there was a wide suspicion that wolverine specimens could be shot after the documentation of reproduction), implicit tolerance of illegal

killing of large carnivores (DE BADEN and CH CORE), and in-group tension, which hindered change and innovation (GR LGDs; tension among stock breeders led to the exclusion of some in-group members from entering a network for exchanging livestock guarding dogs). All these negative side effects referred to informal institutions, namely, social norms regulating interactions among in-group members.

Costs outweighed benefits

In several case studies, participants expressed dissatisfaction because the overall costs associated with implementing good practices outweighed the benefits. Producers backed by other groups proposed that additional direct and indirect costs, related to damage caused by large carnivores, should be subsidized to avoid an eventual passing on of costs to consumers (GR RDP, IT MEDWOLF, DE BADEN, and FI TASSU). Interviewees in the French case study (FR PASTORALLOUP) noted that the unexpected hardships of shepherding may lead volunteers to abandon their placements with local stock breeders early. In two case studies, interviewees noted that damage compensation systems had not been updated since their inception and did not fully cover operational costs (SE CPPs; remuneration for Sámi people involved in monitoring of wolverine reproduction) and the damage suffered by local producers, including indirect loss and loss of profit (SE CPPs and ES CANTABRIAN).

Threat from large carnivores

The last category of trade-offs was related to perceived threats from large carnivores. It was voiced mainly by members of eNGOs in case studies with broad stakeholder engagement. Threat to property was perceived to increase with large carnivore numbers (ES CANTABRIAN, CH CORE, and FI TASSU), and threat to human safety from bears was associated with tourism development (ES CANTABRIAN and FI TASSU). Some interviewees highlighted the potential of food conditioning of bears and of dangerous human-carnivore encounters. This category of trade-offs included references to both formal institutions (e.g., tourism industry) and sentiments related to informal institutions (e.g., fear).

Table 3. Characteristics of stakeholder input and further action to be considered for each category of trade-offs.

Categories of trade-offs	Number of references	Number of case studies	Type of case study	Institutions	Recommendations for addressing trade-offs; further action to be considered
Institutional backing of damage prevention and/or compensation	33	6	Damage prevention and/or compensation	Formal	(1) Plan at the landscape level (2) Promote cross-sectorial cooperation (3) Aim for continuation of measures (avoiding gaps between program periods) (4) Target all members of affected stakeholders as beneficiaries
Intergroup relations between stakeholders	25	8	Damage prevention and/or compensation; broader stakeholder engagement	Formal; informal	(1) Consider establishing or improving facilitated stakeholder deliberation processes (2) Help establish lines of communication between stakeholders and decision makers (3) Discuss and establish rules for communication and dissemination channels (4) Engage the tourism industry
In-group relations within stakeholder groups	12	6	Damage prevention and/or compensation; broader stakeholder engagement	Informal	(1) Establish checks and balances for choice of and duties of spokespersons and representatives (2) Support members in communicating outcomes within their own group (3) Initiatives for sanctioning free-riding and illegal behavior
Costs outweighed benefits	14	8	Damage prevention and/or compensation; broader stakeholder engagement	Formal	(1) Carry out costs analysis to see which demands are justified (2) Make changes to the incentives' and benefits' structure if needed
Threat from large carnivores	5	3	Broader stakeholder engagement	Formal; informal	(1) Introduce/improve consistency between damage prevention and compensation (2) Engage the tourism industry

DISCUSSION

Unanticipated side effects have important implications for understanding good practice and its potential transfer to other locations. Because large carnivore conservation and management takes place in specific social-ecological systems, there is always the possibility that unexpected difficulties may emerge when transferring good practices to another locality even for well-tested actions. The context-bound character of good practices requires a move away from illusionary win-win conceptualizations (e.g., Redpath et al. 2013, Galafassi et al. 2017, Pooley et al. 2017). Instead, good practices should be regarded as a series of tangible and measurable steps in which, activities have been effectively adapted to unexpected obstacles by a particular constellation of stakeholders working together in a certain social-ecological setting.

When transferring these same activities that worked well in one area into another context, novel challenges should be expected. Following a context-dependent contextualization of good practices, as we have proposed, stakeholders facing new challenges when implementing activities outlined as good practices elsewhere, may innovate and broaden the horizon of options available for large carnivore conservation and management. The trade-offs we have presented can help to give direction to future joint initiatives. Indeed, the identification of trade-offs can be considered an opportunity for highlighting potential issues in optimizing solutions. The attainment of desired goals when implementing measures transferred into a new context cannot be taken for granted unless good practices are adequately anchored in the local context, including through innovative changes to the approach taken. Good practices will always involve

adaptation secured by some degree of negotiated compromise among stakeholders (Reed et al. 2010, Vinke-de Kruijff et al. 2014). Good practices are demonstrated when stakeholders manage to carry out joint actions despite not having reached full consensus on every aspect and despite differences re-emerging.

Through the investigation of the case studies covered, we were able to highlight some recommendations for addressing trade-offs (Table 3); a set of recommendations related to formal institutions have largely administrative and financial dimension. These include considering landscape scale management to avoid disproportionate effects on livestock breeders who do not take up protection measures (Widman and Elofsson 2018); ensuring consistency between protection and compensation measures (Bautista et al. 2017); adapting payment rates or measure design; and involving new stakeholder groups, e.g., actors from the tourism sector. Others were more related to informal institutions, for example, ensuring that messages are diffused to the stakeholder groups. All these recommendations should be understood as prompts for framing stakeholder interaction and are not meant to be set in stone. They are procedure based and not content based, to allow for flexibility in stakeholder deliberation and joint action (Hovardas 2020). Some may be easier to pursue, although others may prove more challenging, and this will depend largely on the local context and stakeholder synthesis.

In describing trade-offs, interviewees referred to external factors, most often linked to formal institutions and not controlled by the constellation of stakeholders involved in case studies. These external factors can limit stakeholder joint action, but they may

also open up new opportunities for collaboration. Other accounts of interviewees concentrated on internal factors within the stakeholder constellation focusing on the relationship between individuals. All these external and internal factors are decisive for weighing costs and benefits and working out future developments. In several examples examined, stakeholders reconsidered the terms of their participation if trade-offs realized were not readily reconcilable with their core interests and beliefs. Examples included hunters' reactions when reconsidering hunting quotas and rights or eNGOs' reactions to proposals to introduce lethal control of large carnivores (Redpath et al. 2017). Moreover, some stakeholders maintained a delicate balance between commitment to a process and keeping their options open to negotiate further. This was demonstrated in the example of Finnish stakeholders who agreed to protocols for data collection but who still interpreted the same findings differently. The interplay between conflict and collaboration between stakeholders was further affected by in-group characteristics because these issues were sometimes only half-acknowledged or hidden behind discussions around rules and practical measures. Addressing them can be challenging.

A crucial question related to the effectiveness of stakeholder participatory processes is: Will they only serve to reinforce preexisting in-group reasoning and behavior, or can they lead to change? For instance, some stakeholder representatives noted that they had difficulties transferring agreements reached in participatory platforms to their own stakeholder group, and additional communication and outreach was necessary. It was also important to understand that stakeholder groups may be diverse, and approaches may have to be adapted to the heterogeneity of new contexts and stakeholder constellations (e.g., van Eeden et al. 2017, Herrero et al. 2021). This also showed the importance of selecting representatives, not only for their openness and willingness to discuss but also regarding their influence within their own group.

There is a tendency to focus on formal institutions because they may be easier to deal with and appear more concrete to stakeholders; however, ignoring the underlying social tensions brings significant risks. One way to take both into account and to try to adapt measures to the specifics of the local or regional context is by establishing local and regional stakeholder platforms reflecting the representation of stakeholders of the EU Large Carnivore Platform. Two European Commission service contracts, financed by the European Parliament, aim to address this need (European Commission 2014d) and demonstrate the high political interest in the topic. The idea of such platforms is to enter into a deeper exploration of both the topic and the related relationships, thus investigating more closely the dynamics between formal and informal institutions (e.g., Ostrom 2014) and improving feedback between the two (e.g., Po et al. 2019). Facilitated processes to examine one another's viewpoints, setting up established communication means and channels, and a regular "safe-space" to meet and discuss, will not solve all conflicts once and for all but can make some necessary steps to address underlying issues and improve management. With such an approach, it is important to regard regional platforms as having a dynamic character, e.g., incorporating multiple iterations of stakeholder deliberation, reflection, and joint action.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR LARGE CARNIVORE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT

Transferring good practices from one context to another will most probably engage stakeholders in negotiating the trade-offs that will emerge during this process. Therefore, good practices in large carnivore conservation and management should not be considered a set of fixed solutions. Stakeholders should continuously reconsider any tangible or envisaged costs and benefits related to the implementation of good practices and reframe their positioning accordingly. Trade-offs need to be made transparent in participatory processes (Galafassi et al. 2017), which will necessitate new rounds of stakeholder interaction, allowing for an optimization of good practice solutions to adapt to local contexts. All these aspects are core characteristics of social learning processes in which, sustained stakeholder interaction, joint action, and reflection foster knowledge co-production, innovation, and change (Howe 2014, Galafassi et al. 2017, Hovardas 2020, Boronyak et al. 2022). Moving away from idealistic win-win accounts that often mask trade-offs (Muradian et al. 2013), these social learning processes demonstrate that the negotiation of trade-offs should be acknowledged and even embraced. Good practices in large carnivore conservation and management are found where stakeholders manage to work together to identify and overcome emerging challenges.

Responses to this article can be read online at:

<https://www.ecologyandsociety.org/issues/responses.php/13434>

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Data Availability:

Our research was undertaken within the frame of the EU Platform on Coexistence between People and Large Carnivores (Service Contract No. 07.0202/2016/738209/SER/ENV.D.3, funded by DG Environment, European Commission). All regulations concerning the involvement of human subjects (interviewees, in our case) have been followed and reported to Platform members and the European Commission. We present these in detail in the methods section, second paragraph. No further approval by any institutional ethics review committee was necessary. We did not provide a data availability statement because the interviewees included in the total sample for each case study were guaranteed anonymity and they might be recognized even from anonymized transcripts.

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