

Title

Mapping Italian perspective on coexistence: the Feraltalks project

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I want to participate in the award

Yes

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1. Introduction

Managing human-large carnivore (LC) coexistence in Europe has become a perplexing conundrum, requiring integrated socio-ecological approaches. Populations of bears (*Ursus arctos*) and wolves (*Canis lupus*) are expanding into areas where they were previously absent, such as Italy (Peters et al., 2015; Bassi et al., 2020), driven by targeted conservation measures and land-use changes (Chapron et al., 2014; Pereira & Navarro, 2015). These expansions generate both benefits—e.g., recreational and ecotourism opportunities (Notaro & Grilli, 2022)—and negative impacts, including economic losses for farmers and human safety risks (Rode et al., 2021). Human-LC interactions are shaped by divergent stakeholder perceptions, values, and priorities, which influence both public discourse and policy decisions. Media portrayals of LC incidents illustrate how contrasting worldviews contribute to polarized narratives, emphasizing the need for research that systematically integrates multiple points of view.

2. Theoretical framework

In light of these premises, the Feraltalks project, funded by Fondazione Cariplo (Bando Giovani Ricercatori – started in may 2024), aims to systematically identify the key stakeholders involved in human-LC coexistence, characterize the nature and magnitude of their respective stakes, and analyze the mechanisms through which they interact and negotiate potential solutions. Additionally, the study examines the distribution of *responsibilities* (questa non so se va bene !) and costs associated with implementing coexistence strategies, providing a comprehensive understanding of both social dynamics and resource allocation in conservation management.

3. Methodology

The research employs a mixed-methods, multi-phase design structured into three integrated work packages (WPs) to analyze human-LC interactions from complementary stakeholder perspectives.

a) WP1 – Stakeholder analysis

Initial stakeholder identification was conducted through systematic mapping integrating literature review, media analysis, and chain-referral sampling. This ensured coverage of formal and informal actors. Subsequently, 45 semi-structured qualitative interviews with technical experts (e.g., park managers, conservation biologists) established a baseline understanding of operational challenges and management priorities. These insights directly informed the design of quantitative surveys deployed to broader stakeholder categories (e.g., farmers, residents, NGOs) to characterize perceptions, values, and assessed impacts.

b) WP2 – Negotiation dynamics

This experimental WP investigates inter-stakeholder negotiation dynamics through structured roundtable discussions and role-play simulations replicating real-world conflict scenarios, including the negotiation of shared budgets for prevention measures and compensation schemes. Interactions are recorded, transcribed, and subjected to systematic coding by multiple coders using a reliable protocol. The analysis examines argumentation patterns, convergence/divergence of viewpoints, and collaborative behaviors, generating both qualitative insights and quantitative metrics on negotiation outcomes (e.g., agreement robustness, budget allocation efficiency). This tests conditions fostering constructive dialogue among parties with divergent interests.

c) WP3 – Public Acceptance

This work package employs a Discrete Choice Experiment (DCE) to quantitatively assess public preferences for LC mitigation strategies. An online survey will be administered to a representative sample of Italian residents, presenting hypothetical policy scenarios with varying attributes including implementation approaches, ecological outcomes, and costs. The methodology measures willingness-to-pay and quantifies the relative importance of different policy features. Supplementary attitudinal and socio-demographic data will identify factors influencing preference formation. This approach provides rigorous evidence on which mitigation strategies are most acceptable to the public and which citizen characteristics predict support for various coexistence measures.

Findings from the three WPs are triangulated to ensure proposed management solutions are technically feasible (WP1), procedurally legitimate (WP2), and socially acceptable (WP3). This demonstrates that effective coexistence depends on integrating multiple perspectives. The project highlights the need for policies that are both ecologically sound and socially robust, outlining a pathway toward more sustainable and legitimate conservation governance.

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