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Mapping the Italian perspective on coexistence / Feraltalks

Funded by Fondazione Cariplo through the Young Researchers program (CAR_RIC)

Promoting coexistence between humans and large carnivores (*Ursus arctos* and *Canis lupus*) in Italy by analysing stakeholder dynamics and negotiation strategies - Feraltalks

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(36 months)

AUTHORS

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BACKGROUND

The coexistence between humans and large carnivores (LCs) is a growing challenge in some European areas.

Populations of wolves (*Canis lupus*) and brown bears (*Ursus arctos*) are expanding into human-dominated landscapes.

While this recovery represents a conservation success, it also generates conflicts related to livestock depredation, economic losses, and human safety. Beyond ecological aspects, coexistence is shaped by socio-economic factors and divergent stakeholder perceptions, values, and priorities, which influence both public attitudes and policy decisions. Managing these tensions requires integrated approaches that include multiple viewpoints and recognize the diverse approaches of actors involved. The Feraltalks project investigates how stakeholders interact, negotiate, and share responsibilities in implementing coexistence measures. By combining qualitative, experimental, and quantitative methods, it aims to provide an evidence-based framework to inform more legitimate and sustainable governance of large carnivores through insights on negotiation dynamics and public acceptance.

OBJECTIVES

Funded by **Fondazione Cariplo** (*Young Researchers Programme*, 2024–2026), Feraltalks applies an integrative socio-ecological systems framework to examine coexistence dynamics between humans and LC in Italy. categorize stakeholder networks in large carnivore management and conservation discourse. Analyze the distribution and negotiation of interests, values, and institutional responsibilities among actors. Identify ecological and social conditions enabling socially legitimate and biologically effective coexistence.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

WP1 - STAKEHOLDER CHARACTERIZATION

Objective: Map and characterize the network of actors involved in LC governance in Italy.

Methodology: This phase conducts a systematic review of literature and media sources to identify institutional and emergent stakeholders engaged in human-LC conflict management.

Snowball sampling guides semi-structured interviews (n = 45) with park managers, conservation biologists, and public officials to capture diverse perspectives. A structured survey is then distributed to broader stakeholder groups including farmers, residents, and NGOs, investigating attitudes, risk perception, trust, and coexistence experiences.

Outputs: The phase produces a comprehensive stakeholder taxonomy and quantitative analysis of coexistence perceptions, providing essential baseline data for negotiation analyses in WP2.

WP2 - NEGOTIATION DYNAMICS

Objective: Examine how stakeholders negotiate coexistence strategies and identify factors that facilitate or hinder collaborative outcomes in large carnivore governance.

Methodology: This phase employs an experimental role-play protocol where participants negotiate realistic LC management scenarios representing diverse *stakeholders* perspectives. Developed in collaboration with legal scholars, the approach examines how resource constraints and psychological characteristics influence negotiation processes and agreement quality. The experimental design systematically varies contextual conditions and participant-role alignment to observe effects on cooperative behavior, communication patterns, and outcome stability, enabling comparison of negotiation dynamics under different governance configurations.

Outputs: The experiment produces data on negotiation outcomes, revealing how institutional arrangements, communication styles, and shared values shape cooperation and identifying trust-building mechanisms that promote effective stakeholders dynamics.

WP3 - SOCIAL LEGITIMACY AND POLICY PREFERENCES

Objective: Quantify public preferences for coexistence policies emerging from previous WPs.

Methodology: This final phase embeds a Discrete Choice Experiment (DCE) in a national online survey (n = 1000) measuring willingness-to-pay for alternative policy configurations. Configurations vary systematically in conservation effectiveness, governance model, and implementation cost. Econometric modeling identifies the socio-demographic and psychological factors influencing acceptance and perceived legitimacy of different management strategies. Results provide robust quantitative evidence on which policy combinations achieve both ecological effectiveness and social support across diverse population segments.

Outputs: Quantified preference structures offer evidence-based insights to guide decision-makers toward socially supported and sustainable coexistence frameworks.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The project produces systematic stakeholder taxonomy and quantified preference structures for large carnivore management policies. Methodological innovation integrates behavioral economics, environmental psychology, and institutional analysis through experimental negotiation protocols, enabling empirical observation of deliberative processes. Results yield transferable governance frameworks operationalizing adaptive co-management principles applicable across European contexts. Outputs directly inform evidence-based policy formulation, institutional capacity development, and science-policy integration.

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