INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP Dealing with complexity

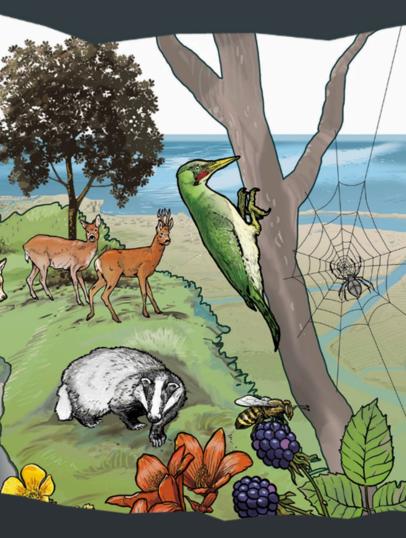
From large carnivores conservation to biodiversity loss: exploring tools for effective communication









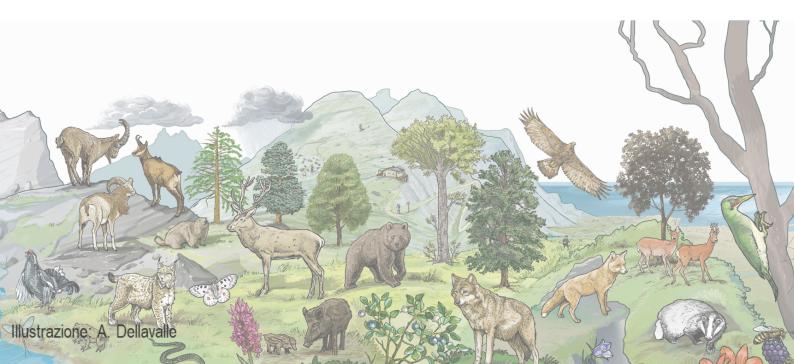




INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP Dealing with complexity- From large carnivores conservation to biodiversity loss: exploring tools for effective communication. 12 JUNE 2024 - Palazzo Lombardia, Milano

Organized by: Regione Lombardia (RELO), Aree Protette Alpi Marittime (APAM)

Organizing committee: Marta De Biaggi, APAM Elisabetta Rossi, Regione Lombardia Laura Scillitani, APAM/MUSE Filippo Zibordi, Istituto Oikos



Introduction

Awareness raising, information, and dissemination are crucial in promoting coexistence with large carnivores. When it comes to communicating the wolf and large carnivores in general, things are never straightforward because of the multitude of perspectives on the subject. Large carnivores are polarising animals associated with various symbols and myths. For this reason, communicating coexistence with large carnivores is not just a matter of scientific disclosure but requires a comprehensive approach that includes engagement, dialogue, and, most importantly, listening.

It is crucial to try to find new ways of communicating these issues, compare them with other realities, and develop new experiments. And again, dialogue, networking and confrontation are essential. Establishing contacts and exchanging knowledge, pilot experiences and communication strategies among projects, institutions, associations or professionals are crucial aspects to develop effective wildlife conservation and communication approaches.

For this reason, LIFE WolfAlps EU project promoted an international workshop on communication, gathering together people involved in large carnivores project. Large carnivores are certainly one of many complex topics for environmental communication. Too often, professionals tend to compare their experiences with those who share similar interests. However, this limits our ability to learn from others and expand our knowledge. In the framework of the communication initiatives of the LIFE WolfAlps EU project, the workshop, organized by the project partners Regione Lombardia and Aree protette Alpi Marittime, aimed to bring together communicators who work on complex topics related to the natural world. Our goal was to collaborate and improve together our outreach capacity on environmental issues, such as human-wildlife coexistence, biodiversity or climate crisis.

The workshop was articulated in two session:

In the **morning session** international experts presented their experience, difficulties and solutions. Topics covered different environmental issues, including climate crisis, invasive alien species, communication about coexistence with large carnivores, and different communication approaches like crisis communication, NGO campaigns and positive communication.

The **afternoon session** actively involved all (in presence) participants in a "world cafè" setting. This provided an opportunity to share valuable expertise and work on selected issues.

Finally we conducted a survey on communication strategies developed in the frame of European co-funded projects focusing on large carnivores: we contacted LIFE and Interreg projects that were running or finished in the last 5 years, asking them about the communication strategies developed, budgets used, lessons learnt and things to improve.

INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP Dealing with complexity. *A synthesis*

The invitation-only session of the workshop started with a strong reminder from the speakers about the urgency of communicating the importance of biodiversity conservation: communicating biodiversity loss and urging public opinion, governments and institutions to act for conservation is not an extra, as we are in the midst of a major mass extinction whose reversal requires behavioral change.

Some speakers raised the provocation that a revolution is needed to change the business as usual in the direction of sustainability and biodiversity conservation, and thus nature communication needs to be radical in order to convince people and institutions to change their habits. In such a context, communication strategies of environmental organizations frequently pass through the polarization of views, in order to be stronger, touch emotivity and convince people to act. This approach is not appropriate for all contexts and stakeholders, and maybe not even effective for some topics such as large carnivores, but for sure needs to be well understood because there are actors that give fire to the conflict: environmental organizations but also mass media. Speakers demonstrated with practical examples that conflict is, in fact, a powerful narrative: it is built on an antagonist opposing a victim and, in such a way, it engages and calls people to action, frequently preventing the search for a balance between stakeholders and thus working against coexistence.

In a broader perspective, communication on biodiversity can increase its effectiveness by getting to know the audience (the values, languages, technologies used by different generations) and adapting the appropriate messages to them. Effective communication must also communicate solutions and not just problems, use emotions (carefully managing them) to engage, control languages and use alliances (e.g. proximity communicators).

The communication of complex topics, such as biodiversity or the conservation of large carnivores, must be strategic, and for this purpose it should be carried out by intergenerational communication teams with different skills, working together like an orchestra.



NETWORKING WORKSHOP- PROGRAMME

Morning session

8:30 am Registration of participants

9.00 am Greetings and official welcome- Roberto Laffi, Direttore Generale DG Territorio e Sistemi Verdi di Regione Lombardia

9.30 am Climate crisis communication - Simona Re, Climate Media Center Italia
10:00 am Non-native species: an impossible communication challenge? - Andrea
Monaco, Institute for Environmental Protection and Research ISPRA
10:30 am Communicating coexistence - Cassiopeia Camara, Center for Human Carnivore
Coexistence, Colorado State University

11:00 Coffee break

11:20 am Crisis communication - *Ilaria Salvi, Dipartimento Nazionale Protezione Civile* **11:50 am** Communication strategies of environmental organizations - *Giancarlo Sturloni, Greenpeace Italia*

12:20 am Conservation Optimism and Positive Communications - Jon Taylor, Conservation Optimism Director

12:50 Final discussion and conclusion of the morning session

Afternoon session

2:30 pm World cafe for all in-presence participants to share valuable expertise and work on selected issues.

4:30 pm Final discussion and workshop "take-aways"



Communicating the climate crisis

Simona Re

Climate Media Center Italia

The climate crisis pose many important challenges to current crisis communication. As a result of the research and training project "Ok!Clima - II clima si tocca con mano," Climate Media Center Italia has produced the guide "La crisi climatica e come comunicarla" to support the climate crisis communication for three different worlds: journalists and communication experts, researchers and technicians, but also school teachers and environmental educators.

The first focus is on taking care of the information by avoiding false balances and clarifying the scientific consensus to fuel reasonable debates based on facts. Also, be aware of the many pitfalls of misinformation (e.g., false balances, false dichotomies, logical leaps, confirmation bias) is essential to prevent and explain them. Taking care of information also means being able to recognize and combat greenwashing by actors such as companies, governments, or the media.

The second part of the guide focuses on tips for good climate crisis communication, as summarized below: 1) To make science more accessible, it is necessary whenever possible to explain its mechanisms, and to avoid or limit the use of technical and scientific jargon, also using metaphors and analogies to support the explanation of concepts. 2) Being uncertainty a key concept in scientific information, it is important not to hide it or emphasize it, but to explain it, focusing on what is known and highlighting its "positive sides". 3) Being the perception of the climate crisis influenced by both cognitive biases (e.g., confirmation bias, anchor bias, bandwagon effect) and many social, cultural and personal factors, experts recommend communicating empathetically, telling local stories and experiences, and starting from shared values rather than facts. 4) Talking about solutions and renewal is essential to foster constructive discussions, by explaining that there are effective solutions, that there is a range of different solutions, and that solutions are already available, linking solutions to goals and explaining their feasibility and the co-benefits for the community and the individual. 5) Regarding images, it is recommended to use authentic images of people and situations, and to build data visualizations by minding the comprehensibility of the image for the audience. 6) Finally, emotions play a central role in climate crisis response, including sadness, fear, anger, indifference and denial. Main advice is to be aware of the central role of emotions while never abusing them, and to match messages of effectiveness with alarming messages of impact, highlighting the feasibility, benefits, and opportunities of solutions.

Crucially, it is also important to consider that positive emotions in stressful situations play an important restorative role for physiological, psychological and social adaptive functions related to memory, recognition and cognitive discrimination, which can promote the onset of mutual altruism and cooperation.



Communicating the threat of invasive alien species. An impossible challenge?

Andrea Monaco

ISPRA, Institute for Environmental Protection and Research

Decades of experience in dealing with invasive alien species have shown that the effectiveness of tackling biological invasions is linked to support from society. In our country, but also at the European level, the level of social perception of the threat of invasive alien species is inadequate compared to the real risk. This also has to do with a general low knowledge of the meaning of the term 'biodiversity' and its importance for our lives.

Understanding the reasons behind this lack of societal support is crucial and leads to reflection on the communication methods used to inform the public, influence their perceptions and induce them to support management actions and adopt virtuous behaviour.

The issue of invasive alien species is intrinsically complex in terms of communicability. This complexity is linked to three main aspects:

- the concept of invasive alien species is difficult to understand, especially in the absence of a sufficient knowledge base on complex areas such as ecology and evolutionary biology;
- the impacts of invasive alien species, particularly the ecological ones, are sometimes difficult to demonstrate;
- some invasive alien species are so attractive (because they are beautiful, colourful or sympathetic) that it is very difficult or impossible to build support for interventions to remove them.

Experiences conducted over the last decade, especially within LIFE projects (Life ASAP, Life EC-SQUARE, Life AlterIAS, Life Ponderat) that have given prominence to information and communication aspects, have made it possible "to distill" a number of tips on how to increase social consensus by improving the effectiveness of communication. Below are some of the most relevant tips:

- it is essential to adopt a new, inclusive model of communication that can build a two-way dialogue based on mutual recognition of differences in knowledge, values, perspectives and interests;
- public support for management increases as a result of more and better information and stresses the importance of information and awareness-raising programmes;
- the need to build a trusting relationship with the public requires clarity of content, transparency, arguments that, in addition to facts, point to emotions and values that are concrete and directly experienced by the public;
- the messages must be as positive and calibrated as possible in relation to the audience and the language used must be simple but rigorous (preferably without resorting to war-like terminology);
- the debate should always be developed in a civil and respectful manner, striving to understand differing points of view and avoiding arrogant or sarcastic attitudes.



The effectiveness of communication increases considerably when it is possible to work in a more geographically limited context, establishing a one-to-one relationship with people. In such contexts, is pivotal the role of the "knowledge multiplier", of the cultural mediator, who must speak, tell, explain, and carry the message that everyone can do something, triggering a process of empowerment that is crucial to reduce the introduction and the spread of invasive alien species.



Communicating coexistence

Cassiopeia Camara

Center for Human Carnivore Coexistence, Colorado State University

In today's diverse conservation landscape, effective communication transcends mere dissemination of information; it must resonate across generations to foster meaningful engagement. This presentation delves into the intersection of coexistence, carnivores, and age in communication strategies. By exploring generational theory and identifying distinct generational cohorts, we uncover their unique characteristics and the profound influence they wield on conservation efforts. Highlighting the pivotal role of tailored messaging, the session outlines strategies for adapting communication to resonate with specific generational mindsets. Participants thus gain insights into evaluating and optimizing their communication campaigns, supported by a practical handout featuring targeted questions designed to refine generational communication strategies. This holistic approach equips conservation practitioners with the tools to navigate generational diversity effectively, ensuring impactful and inclusive communication in conservation efforts.



Crisis communication: informing the Population about Civil Protection Risks and Disasters

Ilaria Salvi

Dipartimento Nazionale Protezione Civile

Communication can improve public understanding of disaster risk and empower the population by allowing them to make informed choices. Lack of information — or, conversely, an excess of conflicting information — can result in the circulation of incorrect information and fuel a climate of distrust and confusion that can impact the effectiveness of emergency management activities. For this reason, public information and communications are key aspects of the disaster management cycle, both during the emergency phase and as a risk reduction measure, and it is vital to deal with the challenges they present.

Civil protection communication inevitably involves a certain degree of complexity, that needs to be dealt with according to some leading principles: transparency and accuracy, obviously, but also clarity, comprehensibility and, crucially, unambiguity.

When a disaster occurs, a common issue is that various sources start talking at once, each one sharing their perspective and their messaging. This can result in an overload of seemingly conflicting information. As a rule, the more complex the scenario, the more important it is to speak with one voice, sharing a common message and even making an effort to use the same wording, to minimize the risk of misunderstandings.

Risk communication in particular – both in awareness raising campaigning and in alerting the population about specific threats – involves dealing with issues such as uncertainty, predictability, the limits of scientific knowledge, and risk perception, which is experienced in widely differing ways by experts/decision makers and by the public. The gulf between 'scientific' and 'non-scientific' cultures and the radically different approaches to risk assessment between nonexperts and decision makers can exacerbate public mistrust, especially when combined with journalists' reliance on the norms of balance, conflict, and human interest in covering scientific issues.

For a complex message to get across to the audience, especially in an emotionally charged situation, building trust and familiarity among the actors is key. To do so, it is vital to use every opportunity – before, during and after a disaster – to engage journalists and the public as allies in communication processes. Working together with journalists in a disaster-stricken area means providing a space and means to do their job safely and effectively even under difficult circumstances: this allows the media to offer better coverage during a crisis and, consequently, helps us reach the audience. Offering professional courses for journalists on specific civil protection themes, on the other hand, is a way to foster mutual understanding, clarify key concepts, and share vocabulary in a low-stakes context.



Finally, multi-channel communication that leverages both mass media and social media is a way not only to reach different audience segments but also to foster familiarity with civil protection issues, cultivate a community and engage users in spreading correct information and countering online misinformation.



Conservation Optimism and Positive Communications

Jon Taylor

Conservation Optimism Director

There has been much discussion during the workshop of how best to support and facilitate the public in understanding science. But science is a very particular language, designed to remove normal human biases from our scientific conclusions. Given this wonderful project is concerned with human / wolf coexistence and our ability to communicate with wolves (a most sensible species) remains shockingly poor, there is perhaps an onus on us not to teach the rest of humanity to speak science, but instead to learn better the language of the non-scientist majority of humans. Much of wildlife conservation is concerned with the changing of human behaviour – a mission for which communication is the main tool. We are not, therefore, communicating about conservation but indeed communicating for conservation. The key steps in the process of employing communication as a conservation tool might include the following:

- **Know thyself** we cannot communicate our message to a given audience until we can articulate it ourselves. At the start of a project there may be as many views of the goal of the project as there are people in the project team. Agreeing on clear messaging that makes sense to everyone on the team is an important and time-consuming process that should not be underestimated.
- Know you audience the slide shows an audience of 'scream' emojis, derived from the Munch painting. Most people assume the audience is screaming. Except the subject of the painting is not screaming: nature is screaming, and the subject is trying to block out the scream. Audience research is neither new nor rocket science, but it will be completely ineffective if one makes assumptions about one's audience and so the research is never undertaken.
- **Understand values** there are many ways of looking at an audience, but the work of the Common Cause Foundation, drawing on Schwartz, S H. (2006), is a valuable lens. This work looks at universal human values and asks where a group might be in a particular context. Understanding an audience's values and 'meeting them where they are' might give an easier short-term win, but it also reinforces existing values. If we need a longer term discourse with an audience, a strategy to lead them towards more intrinsic values may be important.
- **Framing is everything** simply, people are more likely to undertake actions that make them feel better, so a positive framing is always preferable to a negative frame.
- **Tell stories** stories are not just a nice way of communicating; they are the way the human mind processes information and understands the world. They are essential.
- **Get skills** good communication requires much training and a willingness to work alongside communications experts.



Conservation Optimism is a very challenging example of all the above. The negative framing of environmental 'crisis' and 'emergency' has a role to play in galvanising action but is disempowering and isolating to conservationists and would-be conservationists. Very few people will continue with any hard struggle that seems hopeless. Optimism is an essential empowering and enabling tool, but it cannot be based on hope that the challenge is smaller than we feared (it's probably greater!) or that someone else will fix it (they won't!). It must be based on a sense of community, on evidence-based trust in our conservation tools, and in a believable and achievable vision of a world that is healthy, diverse and resilient.

Useful links: Conservation Optimism - https://conservationoptimism.org Positive Communications Toolkit - https://conservationoptimism.org/portfolioitems/ positive-communication-toolkit/ Common Cause Foundation - https://commoncausefoundation.org





- IMPORTANCE OF IDENTIFYING ALL/ Key STAKEHOLDERS (MESSAGES ALL/ Key STAKEHOLDERS (MESSAGES

- MULTIPLE APPROPRIATE MOSSAGES For DIFFERENT ANDIENCES

STOP REPEATING WHAT ARE THE LOSSON'S LEARNED. - D THIS MEANS WE ARE NOT LEARNING





IDEAS FOR INNOVATIVE COMMUNICATION ON LARGE CARNIVORES

What emerged from the discussion on this issue was a combination of previous experiences, lessons learned and inputs from the morning session:

- a. when planning a project
 - there is a great need to involve representatives of different generations in order to preview various types of communication systems as the messages are received differently
- b. communication strategy toward a higher level of involvement
 - include ideas and programmes that use different languages in order to reach a large audience with diverse needs
 - foresee an emotional involvement in order to help a deeper engagement of the audience
 - include hands-on and practical activities such as art products (e.g. wall paintings, creation of films, creation of pieces of art, music, theatre...) as well as new game types (e.g. game books, gaming...) with a higher level of technology to make the activities more intriguing for the young generations
 - improve citizen science programmes
 - develop educational platforms
 - make kids experience the creation of contents
- c. involvement of stakeholders
 - preview a higher level of involvement of stakeholders in order to make them become active ambassadors or messengers towards their group of interest.



LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE MISTAKES OF COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGNS CARRIED OUT IN PAST LARGE CARNIVORES CONSERVATION PROJECTS

For a good communication campaign, we need...

- a community based approach, non-conventional partners or supporters (not only public institutions) and involvement of associations in communication;
- to identify all/key stakeholders (messages and specific engagement); define appropriate messages for different audiences;
- more awareness of the communication effort that needs to be put in a project (eg personnel resources) to set up the basis for a good communication start, also including time for one to one communication and multiple way communication; strong communication activities are important from the beginning of a project; need to have targeted communication for politicians;
- to avoid flare-ups on social media on one part, actively contrast misinformation on the other hand;
- to continue information in the after Life, being honest about mistakes in communication and sharing experiences;
- to be consistent in measuring effectiveness;
- not to emphasize the economic value of the project in the first press release.



PHASES AND ROLES OF A CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLAN FOR A LARGE CARNIVORE PROJECT

- Constantly work on an awareness campaign to prepare people to the possible risks related to large carnivore presence and the behaviour that they should adopt
- Awareness campaign should prepare people to the uncertainty
- Target awareness campaign for different age targets
- Preview a crisis communication team. This team should be multidisciplinary, at least a professional communicator should be part of it
- Clearly define the roles of each team member from the start
- Identify the crisis communication responsible. The responsible is in charge of training other people on crisis communication
- Figure out the most probable risk scenario that might occur
- Include stakeholders from the start: evaluate all the possible risks with the stakeholders to give them ownership of the risks, so that they can continue crisis communication until the end of the project
- Review all similar projects that had to focus on crisis situations elsewhere and evaluate the solutions adopted
- Write down a plan in which all possible scenarios are evaluated
- Planning should include different phases of the crisis with related actions to be undertaken and different tools to be adopted
- Planning should also include different target audiences
- The proposed methodology should be flexible to be tailored to each real crisis that might arise
- Make an address book containing the contact details of the team contacts and their responsibilities
- Make sure that all the project staff is aware of the crisis communication plan, know where to find it and know the crisis communication team composition: all partners should refer to the same person and protocols
- The crisis communication team should be prepared to tackle undefined situation and adapt to them
- Check for other correlated potential issues that might arise
- When the crisis is over and all calms down, evaluate the action undertaken and the outcomes. Individuate the positive outcomes and carefully analyse the mistakes in order to avoid them in similar situation in the next future





How would you evaluate the effectiveness of a project's communication activities? (Focus not on outputs, the number of posts/panels/brochures produced, but on effectiveness, i.e. the outcome)

It is essential to combine several indicators that allow to evaluate outreach at different time scales as well as a geographic scale (beyond the project area):

- It is important to constantly collect social and cultural indicators to build a baseline and to have a long-term time series. Classical sociological indicators can also be useful.
- Use marketing tools, such as media presence analytics and social media listening, to collect mentions and gauge public reactions to the project.
- Indirect approaches such as culturomics (i.e. a form of computational lexicology that studies human behaviour and cultural trends through the quantitative analysis of digitized texts) can be effective in monitoring the outcomes at a large scale.
- Indirect approaches also include secondary indicators that might reflect the interest on the topic: these include citizen science (i.e. an increase in the people that participate), numbers of tourists visiting the area, or the number of request of compensation (as an indicator that informative campaign worked and farmers are aware of these measures).

Non-traditional approach that might be used include:

- the use of on-the-go interactive surveys (i.e. Mentimeter)
- the development of indicators from communication/education initiatives involving gaming
- the development of indicators from communication/education initiatives involving art





Thanks to all participants!



Results of the workshop questionnaire

Survey on Communication strategy, budget and activities developed in LIFE Projects focusing on Large Carnivores ongoing or ended in the last 5 years



THANKS to:

ONGOING PROJECTS

LIFE PROJECTS



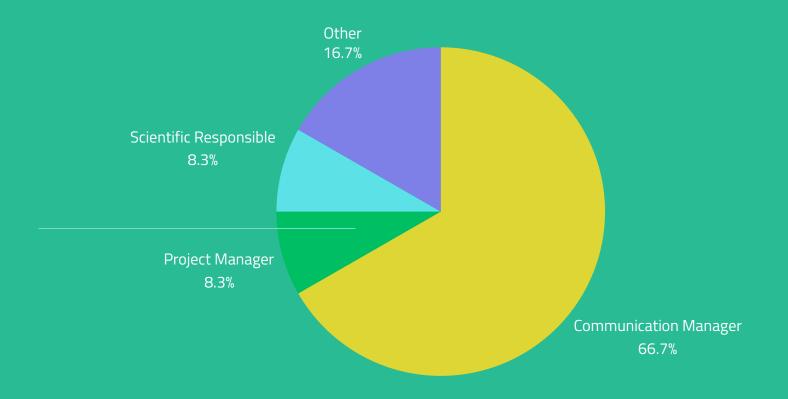


Did your project foresee/have you foreseen a communication strategy on the basis of which the actions were defined?



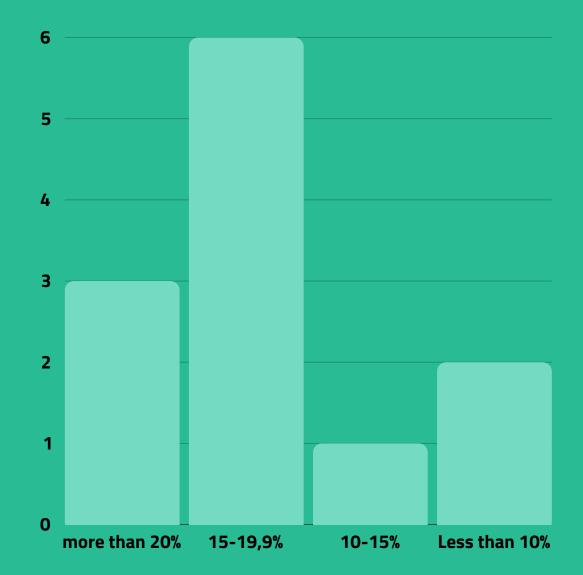


Who wrote the communication part of your project?





How much of your project budget is or was dedicated to communication and participatory initiatives (absolute value and percentage of the total project budget)?



If your project has ended, how much of the budget for communication and participation activities was actually spent (percentage of the total project budget)?



PROJECT	% of the total budget devoted to Communication	% of the budget used for Communication
LIFE WOLF ALPS	25%	25%
LIFE MEDWOLF	19%	19%
LIFE LYNX	17%	17%
LIFE SAFECROSSING	22%	16%
LIFE DINALP BEAR	12,5%	10,7%

Whether your project is concluded or still ongoing, was the planned budget adequate or would you have needed more funds?



Yes Adequate

Would have needed more budget





In the realisation of the communication actions of your project, which professional figures were involved?



Communicators 10 Wildlife technicians 8 Graphic designers 7 Videomakers 2



In the implementation of the participatory actions of your project, who was involved?



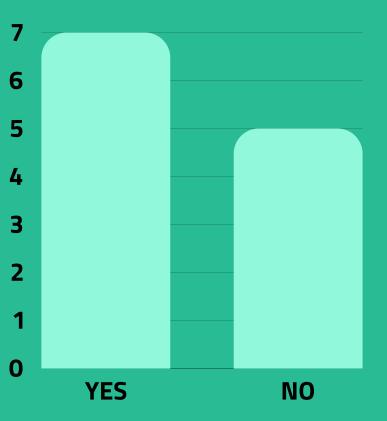
Wildlife technicians 7 Communicators 6 Researchers 4 Mediators 3 Facilitators 3 Was or will the effectiveness of the communication actions be evaluated? If yes, how? Through which indicators?







Whether your project is completed or still ongoing, is there something that did not work or is not working in the communication campaign?





If yes, what lessons do you draw/ did you learn from it?

More full time communicators are needed to fulfil all the required tasks for a big project on a problematic species. Also evaluation of effectiveness of the campaigns should ne enhanced and should serve as a guide for improving the strategy

A higher amount of budget should be planned for coordinating communication activities.

lack of capacity to have an impact on mass media

One example: making official partnerships with local media. They are not used to that and they work with you without that need of making an official agreement

We have experimented with a wide range of measures and some things have not worked out as we would have hoped. Most of the time it is just a question of effort vs. impact: something that has required a lot of work, has not produced enough impact. For example video productions cost a lot of time and money, but don't get much audience.

We also tried to facilitate safe dialogue in Facebook. Quite soon we realized that we do not have enough resources to provide 24/7 moderator helping to resolve arguments that flare up in the comments section.

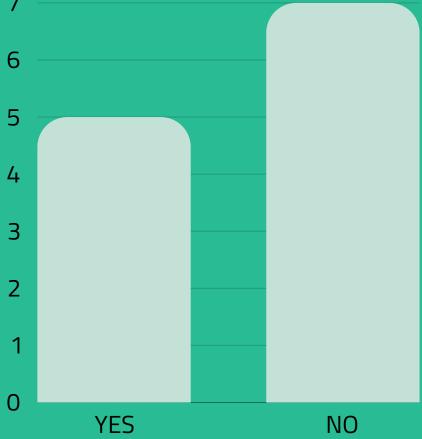
More presence needed on social media

The local communities involvement needs several steps, some of which are preparatory to proceed with the communications actions. If something goeas wrong in this path, the effectiveness of the comms actions is low.

communication campaigns have very short duration and need to be very intensive. Very expensive



Does your project have or did it have a crisis communication plan? 7



If yes: did it work? Can you indicate its strengths and weaknesses?



Yes, it did work. It provided quick reaction of the Consortium in the rising of emergency issues. In rare cases the crisis protocol could not be activated because of vetos from the Press Office of one of the partners

My answer is yes and no since day-to-day-communication about wolves in the everywhere) resembles crisis communication. With this I mean that all kinds of little details can flare up and become the subject of a heated debate. Our approach takes this into account and we have a well-tested way of dealing with these situations. But on the other hand we don't have a proper crisis communication plan for predefined risks.

it worked most of the times, but we are never fast enough

No, due to the different internal procedures of the partners involved

Would you like the LIFE Information and Communication to be reestablished? (this was a sub-category of the 2007-2013 LIFE+ programme to finance projects specifically aimed at communication and awareness-raising campaigns)



YES 100%

YES



The LIFE WOLFALPS EU project works to improve coexistence between the wolf and the people who live and work in the Alps and the Ligurian-Piedmontese Apennines by building and implementing shared solutions together with stakeholders to ensure the long-term conservation of the wolf in the Alps and along the Apennine corridor. LIFE WOLFALPS EU operates throughout the Alps and the Ligurian-Piedmontese Apennines, involving twenty Italian, Slovenian, French and Austrian partners and dozens of Institutions and associations that support the project.

This conference was realized with the financial contribution of the LIFE Programme. Financial instrument of the European Union.

