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Toolkit: Supporting establishment of regional/local platforms on large carnivores

EU Platform on coexistence between People & large carnivores

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Visit the platform at:

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/carnivores/coexistence_platform.htm

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Minimizing
conflicts

Finding
Solutions



01.

Welcome & introduction

Large carnivore populations (wolves, bears, lynx and wolverine) have made a partial recovery over the last decades in the European Union (EU). However, large carnivore presence, especially the return of the wolf to areas where it has long been absent, has created controversy and impacts on rural livelihoods, often in areas where the economic conditions are already difficult. This problem has been recognised by stakeholders and the European Commission alike. They agree that stakeholders need to be involved in decisions on how to deal with large carnivore presence and costs need to be better shared between those affected.

For this reason, in 2014, stakeholders and the European Commission worked together to create the **The EU Platform on Coexistence between People and Large Carnivores**. The Platform's mission is *„To promote ways and means to minimize, and wherever possible, find solutions to conflicts between human interests and the presence of large carnivore species, by exchanging knowledge and by working together in an open-ended, constructive and mutually respectful way“.*

The EU Platform members supported the idea to set up or **regional/local platforms** in different countries across Europe to transfer the EU large carnivore platform approach to local communities. In 2018 and 2019, pilot platforms were set up in six EU countries. These platforms aim to engage and encourage all relevant actors to share their views and address conflicts regarding large carnivore presence openly and constructively. At the same time, LIFE projects such as the EUROLARGE CARNIVORE Project are also employing the “platform method” to bring different stakeholders together.

The EU Platform, the regional platforms and the EUROLARGE CARNIVORE project have worked together to exchange upon their extensive experience with regional dialogue platforms on large carnivores in different European countries and draw out lessons learned. This toolkit is a result of the exchange process.

1.1 The Toolkit's aims and audience

The Toolkit supports anyone interested in establishing national and regional/local platforms on large carnivores, providing guidance based on lessons learned and good practice. It is primarily aimed at

national, regional and local authorities responsible for the management of large carnivores, but also at interested donor institutions, NGOs or local initiatives.

It addresses:

- what you need in place and managing effective dialogue platforms;
- relevant tools and methods for the process;
- how to communicate decisions and outcomes.

How to use the Toolkit

The toolkit gives a series of steps for platform establishment and management, checklists for what needs to be done and tools which can support in this work. However, there is no blueprint to set up a stakeholder exchange platform. Each region and its stakeholders are different and what works well in one place doesn't necessary work as well in another context.

Stakeholder platforms must be organic, evolving processes, requiring adaptability to respond to impulses coming from the group. Such processes ideally enable participants if not to change their own viewpoints, to at least better understand other's perspectives. The steps in this toolkit are not boxes to be checked, but guiding principles. Most important is the attitude of the platform organisers and members and having a shared understanding of the aim. The tools provided can be referred to multiple times over the course of the platform's work, not necessarily in the order in which they are listed.

The toolkit is aimed at management of large carnivores. However, the techniques described can be applied to a wider range of wildlife or environmental conflicts.

**Regional large carnivore
platforms in Europe**

Part 1

Part 2

**Planning and preparing
a platform**



What are dialogue platforms on large carnivores?

- Large carnivores in Europe
- Types and objectives of dialogue platforms
- Benefits of a platform approach

Key considerations and challenges

- What to think about when setting up a platform
- Purpose of the activity
- Stakeholders and their relationships
- Expectation management
- Wider social context



Deciding for a dialogue platform

- When is a platform the right approach?
- Who wants the platform?



Steps to set up a platform

- Getting started: purpose, roles, scale, mandate
- Preparing and planning the platform process: understanding the local context and the stakeholders
- Implementing the platform process: stakeholder engagement, communications, facilitation, the meetings, evaluation



02.

What are dialogue platforms on large carnivores?

This section provides a general introduction about the state of large carnivores in Europe, followed by a discussion of dialogue platforms as a tool to manage and facilitate coexistence with large carnivores.

2.1. Large Carnivores in Europe: Between conflict and coexistence

Large carnivores such as brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), wolf (*Canis lupus*), Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*), and wolverines (*Gulo gulo*)¹ are charismatic species that provoke strong reactions from people. While they are native to Europe, by the end of the 19th century, they had been hunted almost to extinction in most of Western Europe. They remain among the most challenging groups of species in conservation terms on an EU level because of their biological needs – they have large ranges that cross borders – and their potential conflict with human economic activities such as farming and hunting, and in rare cases threats to human safety.

Local improvements in habitat quality, the increased populations of some prey species, public support, and favourable legislation have allowed the recovery of some populations of large carnivores across the EU. This is a conservation success story, though the issue is complicated in that different populations have varying conservation statuses and different socio-economic settings. At the same time, political, socioeconomic, and societal changes, challenge past management approaches for some of the populations. To co-ordinate management across borders, a common understanding of conservation status and management needs is required.

It should be clear that in talking about large carnivore-human conflicts, conflicts rarely take place directly between

people and animals but more often between groups of people with opposing ideas on species management. Conflict and coexistence are regarded as two ends of a scale of human-animal interactions. Both can be understood only in the context of the economic, cultural and political setting, as well as the social and ecological legacies of past interactions (Redpath et al., 2013; Pooley et al., 2017). While coexistence is the desired end state “in which people are able to live equitably and sustainably with wildlife, and where conservation efforts are carried out within the context of wider societal challenges” (Redpath et al., 2017; Linnell & Cretois, 2018), it is not necessarily a stable state and can rapidly be influenced by events.

2.2 EU framework for large carnivore management

Large carnivores were first protected by the 1979 Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Council of Europe, 1979). This is a binding international legal instrument, covering the European continent and parts of Africa, which lists habitats and species to be protected by the convention signatories. The 1992 Habitats Directive implements the Bern convention in the European Union (EU), adding stronger enforcement and reporting mechanisms (European Council, 1992). A key concept of the Directive is that all the species and habitats listed must be maintained in or restored to favourable conservation status (FCS). The types of action required and/or permitted to achieve FCS vary depending on species

1. Two other species are present in Europe: the Iberian lynx *Lynx pardinus* is in a different situation from the other species in that it is considered critically endangered (IUCN red list) and has a very limited range and population. The golden jackal (*Canis aureus*) is currently making a comeback in Southeast Europe. It is however listed as least concern (IUCN red list) and is currently listed as an Annex V species under the Habitats Directive. Monitoring of the population is currently not precise. The European population is estimated to be around 97,000–117,000 individuals (LCIE) or in the EU 72,600–84,300 (art. 17).

or habitat. Annex II lists the species which require the designation of special areas of conservation (SACs) to reach FCS, Annex IV lists strictly protected species (it is prohibited to deliberately capture, kill, or disturb these species or their refuge areas/habitat) and Annex V lists species which can be exploited but only if this is compatible with maintaining them in FCS. Bear, wolf, and lynx are protected under Annex II for most EU countries (with bear and wolf considered priority species). The bear is protected under Annex IV in all EU countries and wolf and lynx in most EU countries.

Strict protection under Annex IV does not completely preclude removal of individuals from the population. Derogations under article 16, permit lethal management under particular circumstances (for example for protecting other fauna and flora or for preventing serious damages e.g., to crops or livestock or for public safety). A European Commission produced Guidance document on the strict protection of animal species of Community interest under the Habitats Directive was re-issued in 2021 (European Commission, 2021). This document focuses on the obligations arising from Articles 12 (strict protection of species) and 16 (derogations from these provisions under certain circumstances) based on relevant Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) judgments and examples of species protection systems in place in various Member States. Annex III provides an example, in the case of the wolf, of how the guidance document can be applied.

The EU and member states also provides financial support for coexistence with large carnivores (see [tools](#) for more information on financing). National financing is used for compensating for damages caused by large carnivores. The emphasis of EU support is placed on preventative action e.g., protecting livestock. Particularly urgent or innovative conservation work for large carnivores has been strongly supported through the LIFE-Nature fund, managed by DG Environment. LIFE has been one of the main sources of funding for actions minimising conflict between humans and large carnivores (European Commission, 2013; European Commission, 2022). While early projects tended to have a strong focus on conservation actions, most projects also have a social angle. In recent years, numerous projects have aimed to establish stakeholder dialogue platforms as part of their work.

Out of all the other community funds, the European agricultural fund for rural development (EAFRD), is used to put in place protection measures for livestock (Marsden & Hovardas, 2020). This is because the EAFRD, which supports the Rural Development Programmes, is available across the whole of the EU (within and outside protected areas) providing a significant resource compared with LIFE and is also accessible for individuals or groups. Collaborative actions and technical support can be financed through the EAFRD, giving it potential to support the work of regional platforms. The CAP has been reformed recently with new regulations being put into action at the start of 2023. The potential to use the EAFRD remains and annual ecoschemes (funded through the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund) can also be used to support protection of livestock (European Commission, 2021).

2.3 Dialogue platforms: Background and definitions

Platforms are mostly set up as a participatory support tool, focussing for instance on developing and agreeing on a specific content (management plans, quota, livestock protection), or on conflict resolution. Depending on the type of platform, the topical focus can be defined by the participants themselves.

Within and between stakeholder groups and between stakeholders and managing authorities, their aims are to:

1. Reach a shared understanding of the issues (increased trust and understanding)
2. Propose concrete solutions together
3. Work on implementing these solutions together

They can be initiated by regional or local authorities in charge of large carnivore management, but they can also be self-organized, where a group of concerned citizens and stakeholders initiate and organize the process themselves.

The EU Platform on Coexistence between People and Large Carnivores was initiated by the European Commission together with concerned stakeholder representative groups on the EU level. The toolkit has been particularly informed by experiences from another EU pilot project establishing **Regional and local level platforms**. These were also initiated by the European Commission, EU Platform members and EU Parliament, though the approach in each country was to work closely with authori-

ties and stakeholders in the region itself to determine the focus of the platform work. A series of steps were followed to establish these platforms, adapting of course to the local circumstances. These are laid out in more detail in Chapter 5 and more information on each platform can be found on the [website](#).

2.4 Overview of different types of dialogue platforms

Platforms may be established under a range of different circumstances and will operate in very specific contexts and with their individual rules of procedure, objectives, and remits.

The different types of dialogue platforms can be categorized according to their level of stakeholder engagement and empowerment, ranging from **information, consultation, cooperation** (active involvement) to **decision making**.

Table 2 gives an overview of the different types of platforms and their characteristics. While different approaches may be desirable under different circumstances, this toolkit is focused on moving to the right-hand side of the table, where stakeholders are actively involved in management. It is largely based on experiences with **regional and local platforms** that focused on cooperation. Further examples of cooperation platforms and the topics addressed can be found in the [tools](#).

Table 2: Typology of platforms

	INFORMATION PLATFORMS	CONSULTATION PLATFORMS	COOPERATION PLATFORMS	DECISION MAKING PLATFORMS
LEVEL OF STAKEHOLDER INTERACTION	Low	Medium	High	High
CHARACTER OF STAKEHOLDER INTERACTION	Closed-ended	Closed-ended	Open-ended	Open-ended
TANGIBLE OUTCOMES FROM STAKEHOLDER INTERACTION	Not expected	Not expected	Expected	Expected
TIME FRAME OF INTERACTIONS OF STAKEHOLDER INTERACTION	Dependent on the topic	Dependent on the topic	Dependent on the outcomes of stakeholder interaction	Dependent on the outcomes of stakeholder interaction
FACILITATOR'S ROLE	Facilitate a top-down process	Facilitate a top-down process	Facilitate a bottom-up process	Facilitate a bottom-up process
STAKEHOLDER OWNERSHIP OF THE PROCESS	Low	Low	High	High
ALTERNATIVE CONFLICT RESOLUTION/ ENVIRONMENTAL MEDIATION	Not applicable	Applicable	Applicable	Applicable
FLOW OF INFORMATION EXCHANGE AND INTERACTION	Vertical and unidirectional, from organiser to stakeholders	Vertical and bidirectional, from organisers to stakeholders and the reverse	Horizontal, between stakeholders	Horizontal, between stakeholders
POTENTIAL FOR SOCIAL LEARNING	Non-existent	Non-existent	Existent	Existent
RULE-SETTING POWER	Non-existent	Non-existent	Non-existent	Existent

2.5 Benefits of the platform approach

The platform approach builds upon a growing awareness over the past decades that coexistence can only be achieved by working together on species management rather than imposing decisions in a top-down manner (Brouwer et al, 2019; Pathways, 2022; Human-Wildlife Conflict & Coexistence, 2022). Excluding stakeholders from decision-making may lead to a backlash against promoted policies e.g., through poaching. Stakeholder platforms can provide benefits ranging from increasing trust between different actors and authorities on the local level; to coming up with a wider range of options for dealing with conflict; to integrating local level concerns into national and EU-level policymaking.

Platforms can:

- Promote a space for constructive forms of communication and cooperation between groups with different interests
- Provide transparency and clarity about the perspectives, needs and concerns of others
- Reduce conflicts and misunderstandings between interest groups
- Increase awareness about solutions and good practices in large carnivore conservation and management
- Integrating different viewpoints increases the integrity of the process, range of options and potentially increases the acceptance of different approaches
- Increase capacity to reach more solid and sustainable management solutions when developed and agreed jointly
- Help develop better working relations and trust between key stakeholder groups



- Pool expertise and resources
- Empower stakeholders to assume ownership of certain aspects of large carnivore conservation and management
- Anchor and adapt good practices to the local context thus, optimising good practices
- Initiate bottom-up approaches, where stakeholder mobilisation and collaboration at the local scale can inform decision-making at the national scale
- Initiate networking with stakeholder platforms operating in other locations, thereby, enabling exchange of experiences
- Establish an institutionalised version of stakeholder interaction and collaboration with a long-term perspective for large carnivore conservation and management

The above listed benefits are only achievable if certain conditions are met. The next section explores some aspects to consider, and pitfalls to avoid, for a successful participatory process.

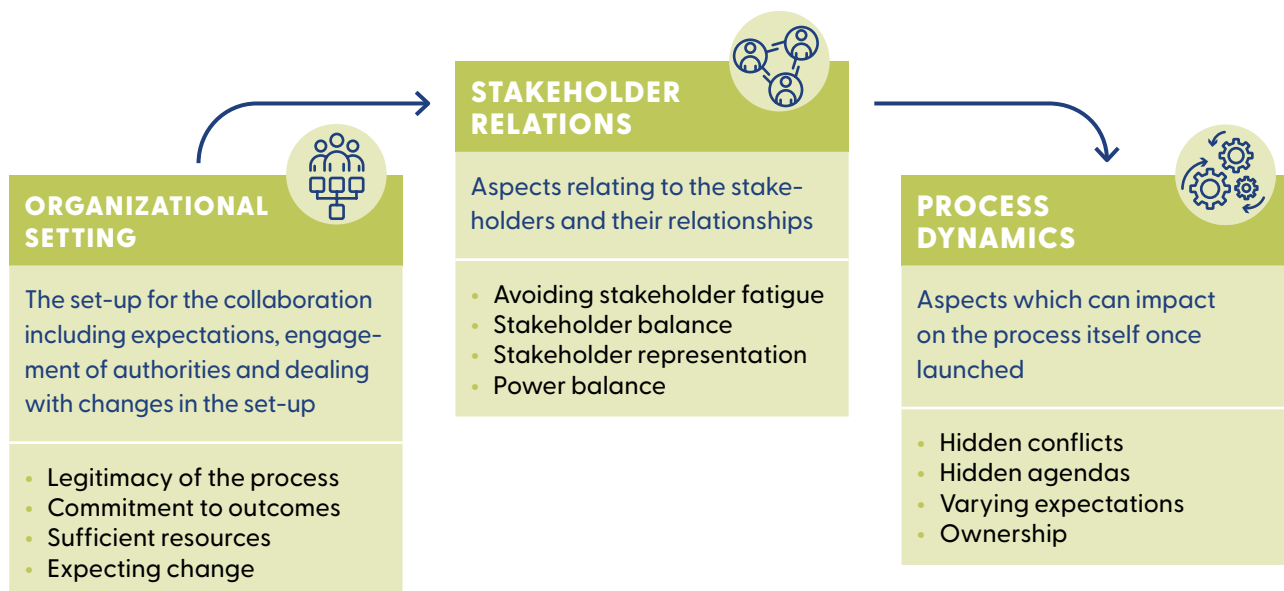


03.

Key considerations and challenges

This section provides an overview on crucial considerations that can affect the success or failure of a platform and ways in which they can be addressed. The different aspects are also covered in further detail in Chapter 5 describing each stage of the platform establishment.

The key considerations can be broadly grouped as follows:



3.1 Organizational setting

Legitimacy of the process: Coexistence between people and large carnivores is the starting objective of these dialogue platforms. However, participants are starting with varying perspectives. The use of the term **coexistence** itself, can be problematic for certain stakeholders. Living with large carnivores can be perceived as a danger which is forced upon local residents who have no say in conservation and management practices. Acceptance of such a process will also depend on the position and quali-

fications of those initiating it (their **positioning and partiality**).

Bringing together a diversity of values and allowing the expression of different perspectives is important but needs to be balanced with a clear understanding of context in which the platform operates. For example, if there are participants who believe that their participation can ensure that all wolves are removed from a particular area, this would not fall within the current legal framework, and they are unlikely to achieve their aims and thus will be disappointed.

EXAMPLE:

Regional Platform launch in Grosseto

At the start of the Regional Platform process, the local situation in Grosseto was particularly tense, as livestock owners had suffered increasing wolf attacks for the last 20 years with no satisfactory management policy in place. Starting the participatory process was not easy, and the participation of some groups was highly desired but difficult to achieve. Although the project was aimed at increasing possibility of coexistence, the participants agreed that the term “coexistence” did not express their aims

well, as the livestock owners were requested to adjust their practices to an increased wolf presence, which implied a one-sided effort, thus had little to do with the harmonious and mutually agreed concept of coexistence. It was rather a matter of co-habitation, trying to continue working on the same land where wolves had multiplied. For this reason, the word “coexistence” was not included in the logo of the regional platforms, which were then called simply “Large carnivore’s platforms”.



Overcoming the challenge: It is important that the participants understand and agree with the purpose of meeting. While “exchanging views” has value and can lead to long-term improved trust, it is often not enough as a starting point, particularly for those stakeholders who are not paid for their participation. One approach at the start of a process, is agreeing on a joint mission statement, which already offers an

opportunity for dialogue and discussions and provides a final aim, against which progress can be evaluated through time. The facilitator and project team need to ensure they are neutral and multi-partial (i.e., considering the values and needs of all equally) regarding the different participant positions and values, while also steering the group towards the shared objective agreed collectively by the group.

Regional platform mission statements



EXAMPLE:

Harghita Platform mission statement

The mission of this group is to:

- better understand bear presence in Harghita County and
- brainstorm, plan and agree on common actions that offer the best solutions to bear presence from the perspective of local stakeholders' interests, and
- by doing so ease the situation for locals and farmers

EXAMPLE:

Grosseto Platform mission statement

Our group is made of members with considerably different interests and values.

We acknowledge such diversity and hereby declare we are willing and able to collaborate.

The mission of our group is not to persuade each other on what is “right” or “wrong” with respect to these values.

Our mission is to advance together to better understand the situation around wolf and hybrids presence in the province of Grosseto and its effects on the various interests groups (increasing our knowledge with reliable information).

We aim at better understanding how each of us sees and experiences the situation and what are the impacts of this situation on their livelihoods and their interests.

Based on this common understanding we would like to develop practical solutions that ensure the well-being and the interests of all stakeholders in our group.

We would especially like to develop ways to support livestock holders in Grosseto because we recognize that they are particularly affected by the increased presence of the wolf and hybrids, among other factors.

We would like to establish a subgroup responsible for communication activities, who will define all communication activity in full respect of the members of the group.

We commit to identify shared solutions within the first months of 2019, and then proceed with the implementation phase.

EXAMPLE:

Castilla y Leon Platform mission statement

Knowing that the members of the platform start from different values and positions regarding the possibilities of living with the wolf, we want:

- to understand better the situation that brings the wolf presence in Ávila and share its effects with the different sectors involved that take part in the platform.
- to open a space of dialogue between all the parts and explore possible meeting points from the mutual recognition of shared and legitimate interests.
- On the base of this common understanding,
- to set and manage practical and effective measures which can give support to the livestock farmers in Ávila that are settled in a wolf area.

Commitment to outcomes: The institutions (regional and local authorities) responsible for the conservation and management of large carnivore, play a key role in the platforms. They are often the ones initiating the platform processes and the stakeholders participating recognise them as having the power to implement or reject suggestions coming from the platform. Depending on the issues discussed, institutions at different levels will be involved but often not solely responsible for implementing proposed solutions. It must be clear to participants that local authorities are not necessarily able to make direct changes to, for example, funding streams without the involvement of regional or national administrations. The institutions themselves need to give clarity on the decision-making process to identify the entities that have the power to modify the current situation.

Overcoming the challenge: Involvement of the relevant authorities is seen as essential for a platform's success. They must commit to and respect the procedures in which they are participating. They must also accept the set framework and rules of engagement for the platform (e.g., "time of peace"). To achieve this, it may be desirable for them to engage as social actors "internal" to the platform (e.g., as a stakeholder themselves) rather than as an "external" actor maintaining a privileged position above and separated from the others.

Authorities should agree to at least consider all proposals coming out of the platform at the start and to explain their final decision-making and how they have taken up or rejected the proposals.

They need to be realistic and transparent about what can and what cannot change as a result of the platform's decisions, also considering their own power and organisational structure. If agreed proposals are ignored, this can quickly destroy trust and commitment. It may be desirable to have several authorities representing the relevant scales (regional, local national) so they can share responsibility for considering recommendations.

In some cases, stakeholders may agree on certain actions amongst themselves without the need for the involvement of authorities. These agreements should – if possible – be recorded and followed through.

EXAMPLE:

Testing impartial (multi-partial) facilitation in Sweden



In Sweden, a model is currently being tested where local, regional and national platforms share information with each other. This requires several separate approaches:

- Participants from regional platforms participate in local platforms and thus create a connection
- The convenor/facilitator of local platforms communicates results of meetings on a local level to regional and national platforms

The difficulty with relying solely on authorities to sustain communication is that they are often party to conflicts. If the level of trust in authorities is low, their communication is immediately questioned as biased or filtered. This emphasises the need for impartial facilitation – especially on a local level.

Communication between platforms and specific functions carried out by the authorities is also possible. Dialogue on derogations within the national and local platforms was fed into the Environmental Protection Agency's revision of the national management plan and even into the process of formulating new guidelines for decisions on derogations.

Sufficient resources: Stakeholder engagement processes often last only for the duration of funded projects, which can make achieving long-term impacts difficult. Unless there is an individual or institution interested in driving forward the process, it is unrealistic to expect stakeholders to continue to meet at their own initiative at the end. Meaningful stakeholder dialogue on highly emotional, political, and controversial issues take time and having to rush through the process due to funding constraints is a recipe for failure.

Overcoming the challenge: An essential part of the platform process should be to empower those involved and support their further engagement. Ideally at the start of a platform process, local organizations with a long-term presence in the area and interest in the outcomes, should be identified and involved from the

outset, giving them sufficient ownership to continue investing in outcomes after the start-up project financing for the platform has ended. Even limited funding for a local organisation to maintain the momentum can help empower participants to seek further funding themselves. Recording the results of each meeting and preparing the next ones is also important, allowing platforms to create their own “history” demonstrating that they are creating something together (Hovardas, 2020).

Expecting change: The political context may change over the course of the platform’s work. This could include changes in national legislation, elections that affect regional political orientations, discussions around funding or infringement procedures initiated from the European level. Changes of staff from the key institutions may also be a destabilising factor.

Overcoming the challenge: It is critical to take these changes into consideration and disclose in a transparent way their consequences. For all participants, ignoring a point of discussion is not a good idea. The issue should be discussed but coming back to an agreed platform mission statement provides an important anchor. The local impacts of the change can be explored but the platform should not be distracted from its original purpose. It may also be necessary to liaise with national government representatives and for example, bring them into the platform processes with a presentation explaining the impacts of the changes on management practices locally. In the case of staff changes within the engaged authorities, the conditions must be re-confirmed with the new personnel.



EXAMPLE:**Changing personal and political discussions in the administration during the platform in Lower Saxony**

In Lower Saxony, the platform facilitators agreed on the platform approach with a specific director in the administration of the ministry of environment. After this person retired early in the platform process, the initial principals were not discussed again with his successor. He also appeared to represent a different political current than his predecessor. One lesson that came out of this: it would have been helpful to clarify these doubts right away, reagree on the initial principles and their meaning, and only then continue with the platform process.

EXAMPLE:**Changes in national policies during the Swedish platform process**

In Sweden during the platform process, parliament decided to instruct the government to reduce the number of wolves. This impacted the dialogue on both local and regional levels in several different ways. The facilitator dealt with it by agreeing at the start of the meeting to debate not whether changes are good or bad, but to consider possible implications for the specific situation together and then to let it go for the rest of the meeting. Giving the matter time and airing it out, allowed participants to express themselves, which in turn eased tension. Additionally, some clarity was obtained to the possible effects of such policy changes and their implications for the points that would be discussed at the meeting.



3.2 Stakeholder relations

Avoiding stakeholder fatigue: In the case where stakeholder engagement initiatives have taken place in the past but have not delivered what was expected, a lack of belief in the process may become self-fulfilling and lead to failure in future efforts. Additionally, there might also be some feeling of unfairness as some actors join meetings during (paid) work time while others, often the ones more impacted by the large carnivore presence, are self-employed and come in their own time.

Overcoming the challenge: It is important at the start of a process, to assess whether more engagement is needed and if it will bring tangible benefits for stakeholders. If so, working with opinion leaders (identified using stakeholder analysis) is important,

to persuade others that it is worth engaging again. It is also important to build upon the work carried out and let people talk about it to capitalise on achievements and avoid repeated mistakes.

Plan time at the start of the process to listen to frustrations caused previously and what needs to change. It is important to be clear about the objectives of the overall project (e.g., “find out under what conditions co-existence becomes possible”), the participation process itself (e.g., “understand each other’s needs and interests better and see if we can come to joint proposals”) and the decision-making procedure (e.g., “If the platform agrees on a proposal the ministry is committed to implementing it”). A commitment to produce something concrete (e.g., a list of proposals) could help in making clear the tangible objectives.

Clarifying these different types of objectives can support a strategy of planning for small wins (see the “small-effort” scenario in the templates for participatory scenario development in [Hovardas, 2020](#)). Small wins are realistic objectives which can be accomplished given the current conditions and resources available. If these are discussed and agreed with stakeholders, progress may be clearer for them. This clearly links back to having realistic objectives in the first place (see legitimacy).

Stakeholders balance: If crucial stakeholders are missing in the platform process, it may lead to other stakeholders questioning the legitimacy of the platform and its outcomes. It also exposes the platform’s work to outside critiques, or delegitimisation. Under no circumstances should a key stakeholder be excluded from a platform. This is likely to lead to an escalation of conflict and can be avoided.

Overcoming the challenge: Conduct a systematic stakeholder analysis to identify and prioritise those who should be engaged. Consider those who have most influence, but do not neglect those stakeholders with significant interest in the platform, who may be powerless or marginalised. It is important to understand who should be in the platform so that the objectives of the platform can be reached (see also [Creighton, 2005](#)). It is worth persisting with certain groups who refuse to participate and make efforts to keep them informed.

In some cases, it may be necessary to meet with individual stakeholders before issuing invitations to the group meetings. This is a negotiation process, as it involves creating trust in the platform and those enabling or convening it. Not only do these preliminary meetings offer an opportunity to understand the stakeholders’ positions, it also allows for clarification in respect of aims and expectations.

It is important also to consider what to do if a key stakeholder drops out part-way through the process. Other stakeholders have already invested valuable time by this stage. The group as a whole should be consulted to see if they think that their work can retain its legitimacy under the circumstances.

Stakeholder representation: Ideally platform participants represent a bigger group or network of members and constituents. It is important to consider the mandate the representative has from their own organisation or peer group and whether that person is a credible representative. There are often differences between a group as a whole and their representative, who may be more collaborative on the individual level. Everyone participating in the platform should know whether a person is speaking for him/herself or for a group. If a participant agrees on a course of action without being backed by the members of his/her stakeholder group (see also “black sheep” effect described below ([Hovardas & Marsden, in press](#))), the rest of the group may reject the process.

EXAMPLE:**Stakeholder imbalance during the platform process in Grosseto**

In Grosseto, a group of livestock owners (called “Comitato Pastori d’Italia”) refused to join the platform process as they believed that talking to other groups, traditionally opposed to them, was not going to be productive and they did not feel at ease. The process continued and even once the results were presented to the regional authorities, the Comitato Pastori d’Italia did not respond to the proposals or engage in any discussion on them. They instead engaged with the newly established regional representatives after elections and managed to draw significant attention with their protests, bringing the situation back to previous levels of conflict. The regional government ignored the platform’s work, paying attention to the louder protests. In this case, not having the engagement of relevant authority and not having included one loud stakeholder affected the outcome of the platform work.

EXAMPLE:**The Black Sheep Effect**

The black sheep effect is a term used in psychology to describe the stigmatisation caused by norm-violating within a group. For instance, individuals who agree without the mandate of their constituents are penalised by their peers because their behaviour undermines their position as representatives. This has been seen with early-adopters of livestock protection measures who may go against the wish for others in the group not to accept coexistence in principle.

In two case studies in large carnivore conservation and management in Switzerland (Core Group Wolf; Cantonal Wolf Groups established in several Swiss cantons to facilitate stakeholder deliberation and joint action) and Italy (LIFE Medwolf project), local producers highlighted in-group pressure on participants in the stakeholder dialogue processes and implementers of damage prevention methods. These individuals were blamed by other group members for having abandoned their group’s position and values and having conceded to rival (i.e., environmentalist) positions.

Overcoming the challenge: Care needs to be taken when selecting a member of the group who is open to discussions but at the same time, has enough standing within the group they represent to be able to discuss options with them and communicate results in a convincing manner.

Another aspect is process related: representatives need to have a chance to consult and confirm back with their group. Time for this should be planned into the process. Representatives or spokespersons of a group may be reluctant to com-

mit themselves before being granted the right to do so by their constituencies. Support might be offered to the person taking part in the process for presenting and discussing the outcomes of each meeting back with the group they represent.

Power balance: In social processes, the discourse may be dominated by particular individuals and agendas, at the expense of others. If some actors feel that their ideas are not heard, they may feel marginalised, potentially exacerbating conflict.

Overcoming the challenge: Carefully designed stakeholder engagement activities with a professional facilitator are essential. To encourage all to speak, it is worth considering parallel activities for groups in conflict or with significant differences in power; and facilitation methods that enable all participants to provide and comment on ideas (possibly anonymously or with creative formats

such as video recordings of some opinions that then are played in the plenaries). One approach can also be to raise the issue of power and privilege in the group and talk about it openly. Groups may perceive each other as “more powerful” and themselves as “powerless or lacking power”. Such a conversation raises the awareness of the group on issues of power and their own use of power.

EXAMPLE:

Animal rights activists talking to hunters



In Grosseto the animal rights activists had never sat at the same table with hunters and livestock breeders (perceived as slaughters and exploiters). The issue of wolf predations to livestock was always managed by the agricultural regional office, which would talk to the agricultural associations without considering the position of environmentalists or animal rights activists. During the platform process, the presence of neutral facilitators, giving weight

to their viewpoints, helped them to contribute more openly. A number of facilitation activities, such as emotion sharing or playing alter ego contributed to understanding the opposite positions. This persuaded the animal rights activists that they were not powerless and, at the same time as representing their own constituency, they could also accept the difficulties faced by livestock breeders in the context of an abundant wolf population.

3.3 Process dynamics

Hidden conflicts: Conflicts around large carnivores are often not about the animals themselves, but rather large carnivores bring to light issues and conflicts between people or indeed diverging world viewpoints. Existing struggles (e.g., devaluation of extensive farming practices and related economic suffering and uncertainties) are exacerbated by large carnivores which often are felt to be the last straw in a system already under severe strain.

Overcoming the challenge: It is important that the operation of the platform should consider and evolve in parallel with developments in the wider social context. Possible hidden conflicts should be explored systematically beforehand. Measuring the baseline situation through interviews with participants and a pre-evaluation of relationships is therefore important (see [tools](#)). Discussions about external events taking place over the course of the process that might affect the platform’s work need to be given space and time. Large carnivore conflicts are usually complex. Mapping the issues or perspectives and showing

the complexity of a given situation could be helpful. If participants either jointly construct this map or contribute to it, the common awareness of the „hidden conflicts“ can be helpful in promoting mutual understanding.

In case a real interpersonal conflict is identified, mediation between these individuals outside the context of the main platform meetings may be the best option. The platform work can then continue to advance in parallel.

Hidden agendas: Individuals may choose to participate in a platform because of hidden interests, such as gaining political influence rather than looking for joint solutions. These non-stated agendas can be important, and in some cases, stakeholders may try to predetermine the outcomes of the platform towards a goal that can be inconsistent with the official goal of the platform, posing a real risk to its success.

Overcoming the challenge: All stakeholders come with their interests and positions, but it is essential that there is an openness and willingness to adapt those positions in the light of new evidence or a better understanding of another's viewpoint. Ideally, the process also brings a change of perspective and greater understanding of diverging views.

If hidden interests are identified, they can be considered in the facilitation process. The importance of understanding the local context and having reliable local information sources is key to ensuring the best possible understanding of stakeholder motivation. Specific facilitation skills can help to make hidden motives visible in a non-threatening way. Asking

deepening questions is one of these skills. It implies that the conversation needs to move beyond a series of (often prepared) monologues toward skilful conversation and dialogue.

Varying expectations: Engagement processes can sometimes create unrealistically high expectations among stakeholders who engage in the platform, and then discover their suggestions are not compatible with the scope of the platform. A platform is likely to experience delivery problems when expectations voiced and pursued are much more ambitious than what can be realistically delivered based on available resources and stakeholder commitment. Likewise, if the range of expectations is too large, it is unlikely that all will be satisfied.

Overcoming the challenge: Manage expectations carefully from the outset. Ensure the concrete aims and purpose of the platform are communicated as well as any limitations concerning funding and time (see legitimacy and the platform mission above). Ensuring the commitment and willingness of relevant authorities to implement results is also key. Small wins (mentioned above under stakeholder fatigue) help to check throughout the process whether the group is on track towards its objective.

Using check-ins as a standard starting point for each meeting also helps to overcome possible mismatches in expectations. A simple check-in question such as „what are your expectations for this meeting“ can go a long way towards creating clarity about expectations continuously. If it is apparent that expectations differ, this needs to be discussed by the group.

EXAMPLE:



Varying of expectations between stakeholders and authorities

In the process to establish a platform in Trento, the project team had a meeting with the deputy chief of the agricultural office, in charge of LCs management in the province. He wanted to have a facilitated exchange among different stakeholders who disagreed with some of the management practices already implemented by the provincial government. The aim of the process was made clear, but only at the first stakeholder workshop did the authorities realise that the process was going to be driven by principles of democracy and that we required the provincial administration to be part of the process, rather than sitting on a side, waiting for the stakeholders to agree on the way forward. The decision was made to interrupt the process, given that the

provincial government was not ready to engage in such a process. This was a clear example of mismatch of expectations, as the stakeholders were met with beforehand and clarified on the objectives of the process thus, they were expecting to have a clear and transparent dialogue not only with other stakeholders at the same level of power, but also with the administration.

Similarly in the platform in Avila, the authorities wanted to use the platform as a tool to limit stakeholder anger against their perceived lack of action. They were less supportive of a process to openly discuss with stakeholders and limited their own participation and thus the expectations of the platform.

Ownership: If a process is seen as being driven entirely from the outside, it is unlikely to succeed. Although an external impetus is often necessary, there is a risk in allowing the organisers and facilitators to carry too much of the work. Participants must have ownership of results.

Overcoming the challenge: A process of delegating responsibility for the carrying out of actions to members of the group should be set in place from the early meetings. This can be embedded in the engagement process with a stage of discussing what each actor can agree to take responsibility for.

This can be built into the „process logic“ for such platforms. Simply put: 1) describe what is happening from different perspectives, 2) jointly examine the causes and effects of the problem and allow expression of underlying emotions, 3) jointly consider the potential for change - which includes asking a) what can individual participants assume responsibility for? b) what do they expect others to do? c) what can the group jointly take responsibility for? The final step 4) is to concretely plan the next steps.

Facilitator skills are required for this as for earlier steps. Dividing the administrative and facilitative tasks may aid in making responsibilities clear.

EXAMPLE:**Owning the platform**

During the Vercors Platform process, one of the meetings took place at a local farm managed by a platform participant. This allowed for a more personal and intimate setting for farmers to express their perspectives and needs, creating a powerful emotional moment that helped participants bond.

During the discussion on the common narrative for the Vercors Platform, some participants took on the role of representative for their group, having a more active task and serving as hub for the dissemination and consultation.

In Harghita, some of the interventions that were proposed as examples for improving the current situation were developed by different groups participating in the platform. Available resources were allocated for implementing well designed actions: implementation of fences against bear attacks in different farms, training for use of damage prevention measures, training for collaborative bear monitoring. These three lines of intervention were developed under the responsibility of three different groups that took part in the platforms, and each of them produced a short report of the activities undertaken, which was made available to all platform members.





Minimizing
conflicts

Finding
Solutions

04.

Deciding for a dialogue platform on large carnivores

This section describes how a clear decision needs to be made to engage in a dialogue platform process and the considerations that are important in making that decision.

4.1 In which situations is a platform the right approach?

A dialogue platform can be used to address a range of issues related to large carnivores. There does not necessarily have to be an open conflict. There could be issues to clarify, decisions on an approach to take or a change in situation to discuss (such as reintroduction of lynx or predicted return of the wolf to an area). While such approaches are highly flexible, they should not be regarded as a solution in every situation.

In establishing a platform, it is important to consider that the motivations are the right ones. A participatory process is a long-term commitment and should not be undertaken lightly. On a local level, the issues discussed are likely to impact peoples' day to day lives and may be emotional. It is important that participants see that they have got something out of the process. Timing is also crucial and sufficient time should be planned to take account of adaptations to the process and potential iterative cycles of work.

4.2 Who wants the platform?

A key consideration to start with is who is behind the idea for a platform and who supports it. If there is no local demand, a process is unlikely to succeed. Equally, if the individual or organisation launching the process is perceived to be partial, this may lead to key stakeholders refusing to take part. Therefore, the balance between having a local champion and ensuring that the position of the organising entity has been well-explored is important before engaging. Without the support of local decision-makers and administrators (who are generally regarded as having the key to management changes), the process will be difficult.

In some situations, it is valuable to have a few key stakeholder organisations sharing different roles in the platform process. While conservation NGOs are most often initiators of such processes, having hunting or farming organisations involved from the start (e.g., as project partners, meeting hosts or chairs), may increase access to key stakeholder groups.

Below some pointers are given on what should be considered in the establishment of a platform.

4.3 Summary of key points to consider

All stages should be considered at the start of a process to ensure that the necessary knowledge base is there to successfully fulfil objectives.

The key question is whether a stakeholder platform has the potential to clarify/improve the situation under consideration. The points below should give some warning signs that the platform approach should be reconsidered.

- Previous efforts to bring stakeholder together have failed
- Local and regional administrations will not commit to the process
- Local and regional administrations want to control every aspect of the process and will not allow innovative facilitation methods to be used
- The political situation is highly dynamic
- There is little local demand
- Key stakeholders are unreachable/refuse to engage
- Trust levels are too low amongst stakeholders
- Approach proposed may be culturally inappropriate
- Funding is likely to run out during the process



Minimizing
conflicts

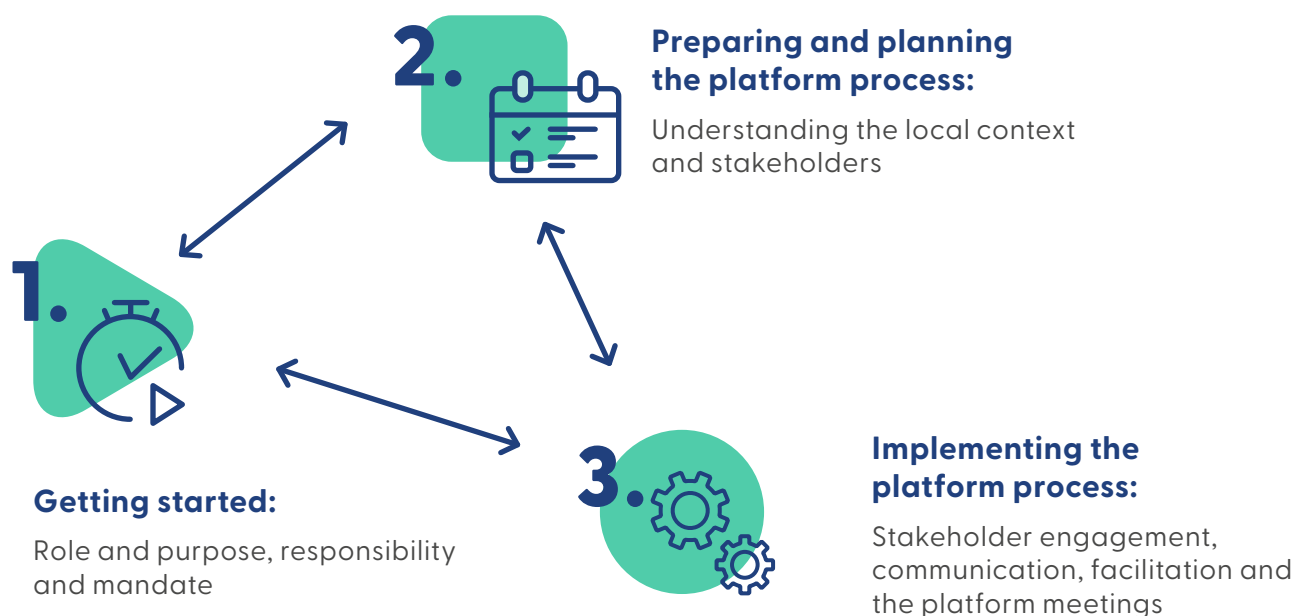
Finding
Solutions

05.

Steps required to set-up a platform

This section provides an overview of the steps required to prepare, plan, and implement a dialogue platform.

FIGURE 1: Steps to a platform process



These steps are **not linear**. While it is important to plan and oversee the entire process, it is essential to **maintain flexibility**, allowing stakeholders to take a step back and reconsider or adjust the course, especially when the context changes or stakeholder groups or participants leave, or new members join. Nurturing an organic development of the group is important and often comes with a strong sense of ownership and energy (Aulin 2015). Such an approach might require a considerable investment in time and human resources.

5.1 Getting started

The preparation phase is essential to establish the basis for the successful operation of the platform. It involves a clear definition of the role, purpose, and

rationale of the platform, as well as the time and other resources available for the process (see Chapter 4 on the need for a platform). It also requires a thorough understanding of the local context and the issues at hand, including the different stakeholders involved and their relationships. While it may seem obvious, defining the geographical scope of the platform is also not self-evident. The scale is important for the specific issue addressed, who is affected by it and where decisions are made. Choosing an entity such as a protected area may be the easiest approach, but this will not work in every context. It is useful to identify an administrative entity responsible for the management of large carnivores in the area, which may help define the boundaries of the geographical scope.

Role and purpose

During this first step of the preparation phase, the role and purpose of the platform should be clearly defined. To provide **legitimacy of the process** for the platform, it should be well elaborated why there is a demand for a platform and who supports it. A distinct goal and intention of the platform should be formulated. This can be revisited later, when formulating an agreed mission statement with stakeholders. Success or a desired outcome needs to be defined too. In a participative process, the outcome will not be known in its details at the outset but its dimensions (e.g., “specific measures that ensure a sustainable

co-existence”) should be clear. Specifying what success would mean, can help to determine the scale and locality of the platform (regional, local, national) or in other words: who needs to be involved to realise the desired goal.

Establishing and running a platform requires good project management. Be sure to formulate a timeline for the platform, to properly plan and procure resources such as time planning (and availabilities of key people), money and staff, and identify any **sufficient resources**. Also, do not neglect internal team building aspects and ensure that communication in the organizing team remains open and constructive.

Checklist for Legitimacy of the Platform: Why should the platform be established?



- ☐ Consider who is initiating this platform: what is the context, their position and their ultimate goal and will it affect the process?
- ☐ Formulate a clear goal for the platform process (a general goal rather than specific outcomes: What is it that you hope to achieve with the platform?).
- ☐ Explain who needs the platform, and why. You could formulate this as the purpose of the platform: why it is necessary?
- ☐ Consider timing and legacy of the platform.
- ☐ Consider the fairness of decision-making and communication processes.
- ☐ Consider how decisions made in the process will be received and implemented by the relevant groups or authority.
- ☐ Consider the cultural and political setting as the political atmosphere/situation can substantially influence decision-making around large carnivore conservation and management.

Checklist for defining success:



- ☐ Be transparent about your own objective and posture.
- ☐ Define a desired but realistic positive outcome (see below) of the platform process.
- ☐ Define areas that will not be touched upon by the platform so that the facilitator can keep the group on topic (e.g. if monitoring is the main focus, removals from the population will not be a main discussion point).
- ☐ Remember that outcomes can be both tangible (written agreement) or intangible (strengthened relationships).

To consider key characteristics of a positive outcome:

- ☐ The outcome addresses the concerns and objections of the relevant stakeholders.
- ☐ All relevant stakeholders' "consent" to the outcome. They may not agree on every aspect, but they feel they have been heard.
- ☐ The outcome lies within the platform's mandate.
- ☐ Incentives for further collaboration are created/provided.
- ☐ A realistic roadmap for the implementation of the agreement is established.

Checklist for choosing the right scale of the platform:

- ☐ Go backwards from your desired outcome, step by step and identify who needs to be involved to achieve these steps (stakeholders from regional, local and/or national level).
- ☐ Think about which administrative stakeholders that might need to be involved to reach the platform's goal.
- ☐ Consider the geographic scope that makes sense for these aims.
- ☐ Bear in mind, that even the geographical scale could evolve with discussion of the platforms' aims and you may need to broaden or narrow the reach.

Checklist for identifying the required resources (time, money, staff):

- ☐ Keeping in mind the desired outcome, try to go back step by step to establish a realistic timeframe in which each step can be achievable.
 - Identify who is needed, and for how long.
 - Identify what is needed, and for how long.
 - Identify how much money is needed, and for how long.
- ☐ Keep in mind that building and establishing trust as well as a working relationship between stakeholders can take time and stakeholders will need to consult their own members.
- ☐ Establish a time frame for the funded intervention.
- ☐ Ensure that time and resources are sufficiently committed for the long run or at least that there is a commitment to discuss and consider long term resources.

Clarification of roles and mandate

During this step, it is important to decide on the roles within the platform and its mandate. It needs to be clear who initiates the platform process, i.e., who invites stakeholders on behalf of whom. At the same time, to encourage motivation and eventual **commitment to outcomes** by all, it needs to be clear what

decision-making power the platform should have and what roles participants will have. Division of responsibilities should also take account of potential changes in expectations (See: **expecting change**), i.e., what happens in the case that the administrators involved are replaced by others, how engagement is institutionalised, etc.

What is the division of responsibility?



- ☐ Define the roles of convener, organiser, facilitator, experts, and participants.
- ☐ Clarify any positioning of those in important organisational roles (organiser, facilitator) and the extent that they will be regarded as impartial (multi-partial) or neutral by the members.
- ☐ If a platform member has a convenor/chair role, clarify the process for choosing this person.

Checklist for setting up a mandate for the platform



- ☐ Decide on the mandate and type of decision-making power the platform has.
- ☐ In cases where the platform has no decision-making power, clarify how proposals and agreements will be handled and followed up.
- ☐ The mandate should clearly state the purpose of the platform process and must be acceptable to all stakeholders and reflect their concerns.
- ☐ It should ideally include the following:
 - Main purpose and objective
 - Preliminary agenda items
 - Guiding principles for interaction between the members
 - Structure of the platform
 - Duration and finances
 - Links between the platform and decision-makers/administration

RESOURCES

National Dialogue Handbook-A Guide for Practitioners	Supports stakeholders and practitioners (both local and international) to address the challenges they face and to pursue the most appropriate design for their particular context (with case studies).
Multi-Stakeholder Processes for Conflict Prevention & Peace-building: A Manual (p. 18)	Exploration of the multi-stakeholder approach from the perspective of civil society organisations (CSOs) whether as convenor or as an invited participant.
The public participation handbook: Making better decisions through citizen involvement	Classic book on the engagement of stakeholders in decision-making processes.
How to design and facilitate multi-stakeholder partnerships	Step by step guide on designing a stakeholder engagement process.
Territorial consultation guide	Guide to engaging in a stakeholder engagement process on the level of territories/communes (in French).

5.2 Preparing and planning the platform process

Stakeholder platforms bring together a variety of different perspectives, enabling a process of conflict identification and empowerment of stakeholders to seek solutions that do not ignore differences and difficulties. To achieve this, stakeholders must feel a sense of ownership of the platform. It is important to select a broad **representation** of stakeholders. Good facilitation and a discus-

sion on conduct in meetings helps avoid single actors taking up too much space and dominating conversations (helps maintain **power balance**). The creation of a constructive process thus needs preparation and planning, which includes assessing and understanding the local context, usually through interviews, preparatory meetings, and on-site visits, as well as mapping and understanding stakeholders. Understanding previous processes in the same area is essential to **avoiding stakeholder fatigue**.

Understanding the local context



- ☐ Identify the current situation regarding conflict and cooperation vis a vis coexistence of people and large carnivores in the region by, for example, mapping actors and perspectives.
- ☐ Unless the situation is already very well-understood, a thorough fact-finding process should be carried out, normally involving a review of relevant documents and interviews with all potentially relevant stakeholders (see below).
- ☐ Get to know the historical processes and events that have contributed to the situation at hand.
 - A pre-evaluation (see **evaluation below**) can be useful to help measure the baseline situation.
 - A range of tools exist to assess the current state of the conflict (see below). Identifying the type of conflict and how deeply engrained it is will help clarify whether it can be addressed through a platform process and the best facilitation approaches.
- ☐ Set a baseline: clarify if there are any historical influences on conflicts/coexistence with large carnivores (such as previous experiences and relationships, occurrences or similar endeavours); what is the level of “social acceptance” of large carnivores and of management practices?
- ☐ Understand the type of problem, risks, and opportunities you are facing, i.e., have a good understanding of the relevant (local) issues, a SWOT analysis may help with this.
 - Seasonal influences
 - General political landscape and developments (e.g., election dates)
- ☐ Depending on the cultural context, conflicts may not be clearly expressed.
 - Ensure in discussions with local actors that you understand what types of activities are culturally acceptable.

RESOURCES

The dialogue/conflict triage	The dialogue/conflict triage can help to identify which kind of dialogue is required and highlight possible risks and opportunities integral to your context. It is an analysis tool that considers both the levels of complexity and conflict escalation.
Perspective and stakeholder/actor mapping	Mapping perspectives in addition to mapping actors helps to provide a more complete picture of the problems that exist within a given area.
Glasl's nine escalation levels	This model can be used to assess in which phase of the conflict the stakeholders currently find themselves. From there it can be decided if the conflict can still be resolved by means of mediation and which conflict handling method should be applied by a facilitator.
The resistance line	This is an alternative to Glasl's conflict escalation model and is inspired by Myrna Lewis. It forms the basis of the conflict axis in the Triage analysis tool .
Adapted SWOT analysis (Hovardas, 2020)	An adapted Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats analysis (SWOT) is a useful method with which you identify in-group and inter-group aspects that will most probably affect platform operation (Hovardas, 2020). For each stakeholder group, semi-structured interviews can be conducted with selected group members to identify in-group aspects (pertaining to each group), which may promote or hinder the operation of the platform (Strengths and Weaknesses, respectively). Focus groups can be employed for identifying aspects of intergroup relations (relations between stakeholder groups) which may again promote or hinder the operation of the platform (Opportunities and Threats, respectively).

Understanding the stakeholders

Stakeholders can be strong supporters of the platform or oppose it and try to hinder the process. They can be organisations, groups or individuals and might include farmers, livestock holders,

governmental bodies, NGOs, the local community, the tourist sector etc. You need to identify who potential platform stakeholders are and include them as soon as possible to help address conflicts or issues early on.

Checklist for Identifying stakeholders



- ☐ Identify the main stakeholders with an interest in or position on large carnivores present in the region. This can be done with a "neutral" local actor such as the administration or park authorities, or it can already bring together a few different interest groups.
 - Think of all the people who would be affected by the platform process, who have influence or even power over it, or have an interest in its success or non-success.
 - Try to further examine their position or perspective on the subject matter (for example through the above-mentioned interviews). You can also check their websites, press releases, local newspapers, social media platforms, etc.





- Involve the stakeholders in identifying the various players in the situation at hand: use a snow-balling process to identify stakeholders by asking them to suggest people who should be involved.
- Analyse existing relationships including identifying where there are already ongoing conflicts (on a personal or organisational level). If serious, these may need to be addressed outside the setting of the main platform.
- Carry out stakeholder mapping (visualisation) to identify how the platform stakeholders are connected to each other.
 - Draw a grid with four quadrants and two axes (1. high power, high interest; 2. high power, low interest; 3. low power, high interest; 4. low power, low interest). Categorize stakeholders with regard to their degree of influence and interest. This can be done together with the platform organisers on paper or online using a tool such as Miro.
 - While focusing on stakeholder relations, keep in mind to also indicate potential power imbalances between stakeholders.
 - Go through your visualisation and look for possible unequal stakeholder representations in your mapping. It is not realistic that you will be able to remove power differences, but this will help you to be more conscious of them and to consider strategies in dealing with them.

RESOURCES

Template for stakeholder analysis	A template on how to present a stakeholder analysis in a simple way.
Template for stakeholder interview	A template providing a structured questionnaire for a stakeholder interview.
LIFE EUROLARGE CARNIVORES: Human-Large Carnivores Co-existence in Europe – A Comparative Stakeholder Network Analysis	Best practice example of a methodical, scientific stakeholder analysis as part of a project aimed at improving human coexistence with large carnivores in Europe through communication and transboundary cooperation.
Kumu.io	Kumu.io is a valuable tool for mapping stakeholders and perspectives. It allows for the inclusion of power differences, conflict lines, notes and more.
A guide to stakeholder mapping	Mapping and analysing stakeholders can reduce the risk of excluding important role players. Considering the positions or perspectives of the stakeholders can also help practitioners in their design of meetings and processes.

5.3 Implementing the platform process

Dialogue generates meaning in a group. However, when inviting stakeholders to a platform for dialogue, one needs to remember that inclusion through participation does not automatically guarantee participation in power:

“Genuine engagement by the main stakeholders, broad consultations, and an inclusive preparatory mechanism foster legitimacy and ownership. These are crucial factors in determining whether the process has broad-based support and whether key actors are invested” (Blunck et al. 2017).

The pitfalls of **varying expectations** must be avoided by identifying why participants are taking part and whether **hidden agendas** or **hidden conflicts** may surface during the process. A key part of the process is ensuring that **ownership** is shared and can eventually, ideally, be handed to stakeholders.

To avoid unrealistic expectations, it is important to clearly communicate the level of influence that stakeholders should expect. Being clear about the nature of the dialogue from the start reduces the risk of stakeholders being disappointed when they cannot directly influence the decisions that are made by those with decision-making power.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Checklist for selecting and engaging stakeholders:



- ☐ By combining your insight from your stakeholder analysis and mapping, you can now identify the stakeholders you need to involve.
- ☐ There are various methods to do this, depending on the aims of the platform. One possibility is a power-interest grid to help identify stakeholders with the greatest influence and interest, and those who offer insight and context.
- ☐ However, this method can also be criticised for excluding those stakeholders with little power. A decision must therefore be taken whether you are seeking for greatest representativeness of different interest groups or a geographical area for example as this will have.
- ☐ The size of the platform should be carefully considered – all important groups should be included but it should not be unmanageable (15-30 participants is ideal).
- ☐ During the first contact with stakeholders clarify what the initial purpose of the platform is, who is initiating it and their level of influence of the platform (roles and mandate).
- ☐ Ideally ensure that individuals are willing to participate in the process (i.e., the same person comes to each meeting or at least replacements are exceptional).
- ☐ Provide an idea of the intensity of the work requested (e.g., half a day every two weeks), so that they can also arrange other working commitments and adjust their timing.

COMMUNICATION AND RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

Checklist for ground rules for successful engagement



- ☐ The role of the convenor and facilitators remaining as third parties rather than proposing solutions themselves should be clarified to the participants.
- ☐ Facilitators or convenors should check that communication, methods, and meeting settings are in-line with cultural norms. That also applies to norms of communication regarding different professions, e. g., scientific, or political language.
- ☐ Standards for neutrality, confidentiality and equal treatment of participants should be set at the start of the process to build trust and create a safe and supportive environment.
- ☐ Less well-equipped groups might need structural support to even out power imbalances (for example financial support to those having to give up work time to take part).
- ☐ Stakeholder's attitudes to one another should be discussed and rules agreed:
 - All stakeholders must be prepared to learn – curiosity should be fostered.
 - Stakeholders must actively listen and treat one another with respect even if they do not agree to move from discussion to dialogue.
- ☐ Rules for communication and transparency should be agreed on by the group e. g., what can be communicated when, by whom and how the outcomes of each meeting are agreed and shared.
- ☐ At this stage, the mandate of the platform can be developed into an agreed “mission” including the rules of engagement for all stakeholders.
- ☐ Building understanding partnerships and trust takes time – there should be a shared understanding about how long the process might take.

RESOURCES

BiodivERsA Stakeholder Engagement Handbook	A non-academic practical guide for identifying relevant stakeholders to engage with. The Handbook considers a three-step stakeholder identification process: identification of relevant stakeholders; assessing and prioritisation; and developing understanding.
Outline of approach: Regional/local platforms on coexistence between people and large carnivores	A fourfold approach to establishing regional/local platforms on coexistence between people and large carnivores in the EU.
A dialogic framework logic for longer processes	It is quite common for groups to jump straight from observation to discussing solutions. The dialogic framework suggests following four steps that lead to a deeper dialogue that produces more sustainable results.
Collection of models for participation: “A chase through the maze”	An extensive collection of a wide variety of different models of participation & empowerment.
Influence-Interest matrix	Being clear about the level of influence helps to avoid the risk of unrealistic stakeholder expectations. This matrix provides some clarity as to how to design and communicate the aims of a dialogue process and individual meetings.

Facilitation

Facilitation aims at providing a space for constructive dialogue to take place. This involves improving group dynamics and supporting joint decision-making where needed. A facilitator ensures that all stakeholders are involved or represented and enables the establishment of rules and structures as well as steps to

follow in case participants do not adhere to the commonly agreed upon rules. Different types of facilitation are appropriate for different types of platforms, the information below is focused on group conflict resolution where it is assumed a trained facilitator is needed.

- ☐ Define the type of facilitation that is needed for the platform using your findings from **preparing and planning the platform process** e.g., the dialogue/conflict triage or conflict analysis tools referred to above.
- ☐ Define the qualifications and competences needed for the facilitation of the platform.
- ☐ Select a suitable facilitator who responds to the above requirements.



A good facilitator should:

- ☐ Be “multi-partial”. This is represented as an attitude of non-judgement (allowing space for all perspectives) combined with that of empathetic presence. This contrasts with a distant sense of non-involvement (impartiality).
- ☐ Offer a safe space for expressing all relevant thoughts even when, and especially when, they are difficult to express.
- ☐ Give everybody the chance/opportunity to contribute.
- ☐ Respect and consider all viewpoints.
- ☐ Make sure discussions stay focused.
- ☐ Ask questions to heighten sharing and clarify meaning.
- ☐ Elucidate and recapitulate key points to deepen understanding.
- ☐ Offer processes that promote effective, creative, and constructive thinking.
- ☐ Be open to learning themselves both from stakeholders and by asking for supervision/peer-to-peer feedback.
- ☐ Allow for short digression, but never lose focus on the overall objective of the dialogue.
- ☐ Does not steer dialogue in a certain direction (promoting own agenda).



RESOURCES FOR FINDING A GOOD FACILITATOR

What to look for when appointing a facilitator or mediator

While there are many professional facilitators who can lead workshops, there are not many who possess the skills to deal with tension, resistance and conflict should these arise during a meeting.

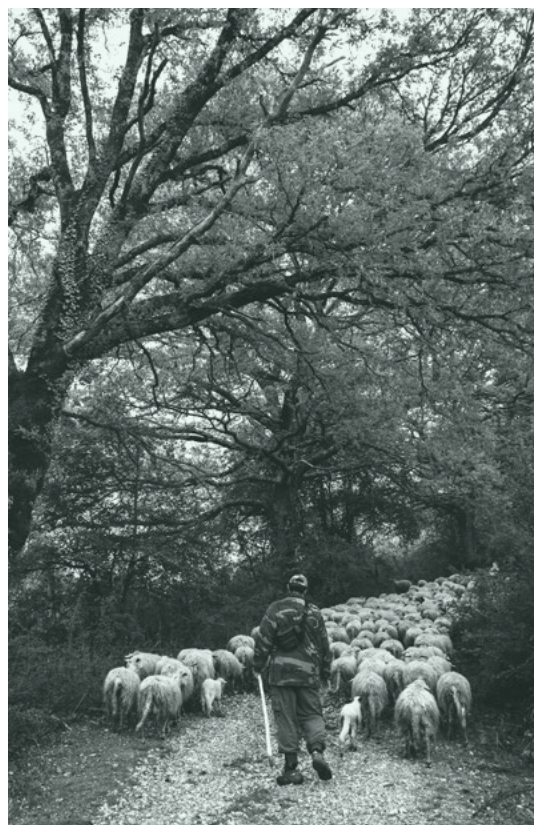
Terms of Reference for a facilitator

When hiring a facilitator or mediator to act as an independent third party in conflicts or conversations, terms of reference need to be drawn up.
Here is a short guide on drawing up the terms of reference with examples.

Checklist for setting up the context for dialogue:



- ☐ Ensure a comfortable setting for discussions.
- ☐ Consider the configuration of the room and how seats are placed. Sitting in a circle gives a sense of equality and improves direct sight lines. A semi-circle may also be appropriate. Moving around during the process may make it seem more dynamic.
- ☐ Ask stakeholders for past positive experiences with dialogue.
- ☐ Let them share their experience and the characteristics/factors that enabled good communication.
- ☐ Note these factors on a flip chart.
- ☐ Let the group reflect, comment on, and discuss these contributions to enable a common understanding of what good communication means to the group



Overview of useful facilitation methods

A very wide range of potential facilitation techniques exist. Some are listed below, however, a trained facilitator may choose to use others.

MEETING SECTION	TECHNIQUE	EXAMPLES
Starting the meeting	Icebreakers and check-ins	Ideas for how to conduct a check in
Setting the rules	Should be agreed at the start of the process with some suggestions from the facilitator, adapted by the group. If possible, involve the group in formulating rules.	Asking a group – or even participants in advance – what they need to feel safe to express themselves freely is another way of starting a conversation on “rules” or formulating a suggestion for the group to agree upon. If a sensitive topic is to be addressed, potentially use Chatham House rules or the Vegas Rule (no external reporting of who said what).
Understanding one another’s positions	Various methods exist for swapping roles or examining different scenarios and understanding opposing perspectives.	Asking questions to broaden perspectives A conversation from two sides
Provoking discussion	Working together in smaller groups and coming back together for an overview.	Salon method (get participants to take a walk outside in pairs or threes and then report back on what the other person said freely – no note taking). Smaller discussion groups with a set amount of time and defined reporting back e.g. Buzz groups and adapted Charette method.
Making decisions	It should be clear from the start how decisions will be made so this does not come as a surprise.	Consensus vs. voting Using a particular method such as Multi Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA) to logically break down a decision into different steps and use set criteria to evaluate it. Including the minority voice in decision making (rather than consensus).
Ending the meeting	Meeting evaluation/taking the temperature and checking out.	A method for checking out at the end of meetings.

RESOURCES

Guide to Facilitating Dialogues by University of Missouri	A guide presenting eight key factors for being a good facilitator. Further readings are provided as well.
Dialogue and Facilitation: Tools for Generative Conflict & Resilient Groups by Mediators Beyond Borders	A module aimed at providing understanding of how to use dialogue to address conflict, promote healthy communication, and build resilient projects. The module also includes techniques for effective facilitation.
Facilitator Tool Kit by the University of Wisconsin-Madison	A comprehensive, easy-to-use guide to tools, methods, and techniques for assisting groups with planning and improvement projects and interactive meetings. The selection and application of practical tools that have been tested with university groups.
CNRD resources for Natural Resource Dialogues and Mediation	A collection of tools, skills, meta-skills, and a framework for dialogue in natural resource conflicts and dialogues.
Lift Pattern Language for Transformative Dialogue	A collection of tools and scenarios presented as a series of “design elements” or patterns for use in dialogue and decision-making

The platform meetings

To set-up a platform meeting you will need to find a venue and set a date and time. Be sure to pick a location and time which promote inclusion and do not create barriers for participation and engagement (practicability and logistics). Plan for a realistic meeting duration, allowing enough time for stakeholders to

express their opinions and ideas. In a conflict-resolution process, it is recommended that initial meetings take place face to face as far as possible. With the group agreement, it may be possible to move some discussions online (e.g., clarifying results, group work or meetings within a smaller group).

Checklist for carrying out the meetings:

- ☐ Find suitable place and time:
 - Consider the type of room, daylight, access to suitable materials.
 - Consider the time of year (not conflicting with farming practices for example) and the time of day (fitting with working practice, ideally family-friendly).
 - Consider providing food for a convivial atmosphere, this is important for breaking down barriers and allowing informal discussion.
- ☐ Create an agenda, assign a time limit for each item.
- ☐ Ensure the agenda is distributed to everyone attending the meeting.
- ☐ Arrange for a note-taker (distribute minutes afterwards and make them available to participants and potentially online).
- ☐ End the meeting with setting the next steps:
 - With the platform stakeholders, decide on a frequency and timing of future meetings.
 - Set an agenda for the next meeting.
- ☐ Allow space and time for participants to mingle before, during and after the meeting. Many good conversations occur within these spaces spontaneously.

RESOURCES

EU Regional Platforms on People and Large Carnivores	Conflicts on large carnivores vary significantly across the EU. Therefore, regional platforms on people and large carnivores in areas with ongoing conflicts focused on large carnivore presence were established. The website gives detailed information about regional context, the platforms' development, and activities.
Template for a platform meeting agenda	An exemplary template for a meeting agenda.

Evaluation

The platform's effectiveness should be measured with a pre- and post-evaluation to analyse how the baseline situation has evolved and what impact the inter-

vention has had. It is also worth "taking the temperature" in a simple way at the end of every meeting to ensure that participants are still on board.

Checklist for evaluating the platform work:



- ☐ "Temperature-taking" at the end of a meeting can be kept simple "what worked well?", "what should be changed?"
- ☐ Consider the main issues you are trying to address from the different perspectives e.g., is the main aim to improve relationships or address a specific conservation issue.
- ☐ Formulate questions in a way that they can be re-asked after the process has taken place.
- ☐ Consider carefully the timing of the evaluation (early enough in the process before participants have already changed their attitudes but after the platform membership has been established and stabilised).
- ☐ Use a format that suits the setting (online vs. paper handed out at the meetings).

RESOURCES

Template for a pre- and post-evaluation	An evaluation questionnaire which can be used in one of the first meetings of a platform to evaluate relationships at the start of the process. The same questionnaire can be used after the process to evaluate change.
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