



Project

Co-creating coexistence in shared landscapes

Photo: Robin Rigg

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Where we are and how we got here

The relationship between pastoralism and wildlife has gone through several changes over time since the domestication of livestock. Pastoralists and wildlife occupied the same spaces for large parts of our common history, but by the late 19th century European wildlife populations had been greatly reduced in range and numbers [1]. The 20th century saw the recovery of wild herbivores and the emergence of the environmental movement [2]. Wildlife management practices centred on sustainable exploitation enabled locally adapted, negotiated compromises to be made between hunting interests and other land uses such as forestry and farming [3]. By the turn of the millennium large carnivores were returning to many of these landscapes [4]. This led to a wide range of direct impacts on pastoralism (e.g. loss of livestock to depredation) as well as highly polarised social conflicts about the way these wildlife species should be managed and even about the legitimacy of different land uses and activities (Fig. 1).

Conflicts around large carnivores, especially wolves (*Canis lupus*), have come to a head in recent years; so much so that all European institutions (the European Parliament, European Commission, European Council and Court of Justice of the EU as well as the Council of Europe), and many national and regional governments have been embroiled in heated technical, political and legal discussions about the future of pastoralism and the management of wildlife (especially large carnivores) [5]. Among the many dimensions of these complex conflicts is a conflict over contested knowledge surrounding the utility of different animal husbandry, wildlife management and governance practices to reduce both the damages and the conflicts [6].

Vision and objective

In 2024, the Food, Bioeconomy Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment programme¹ of Horizon Europe (the EU's key funding mechanism for research and

¹ <https://cordis.europa.eu/programme/id/HORIZON.2.6/en>.

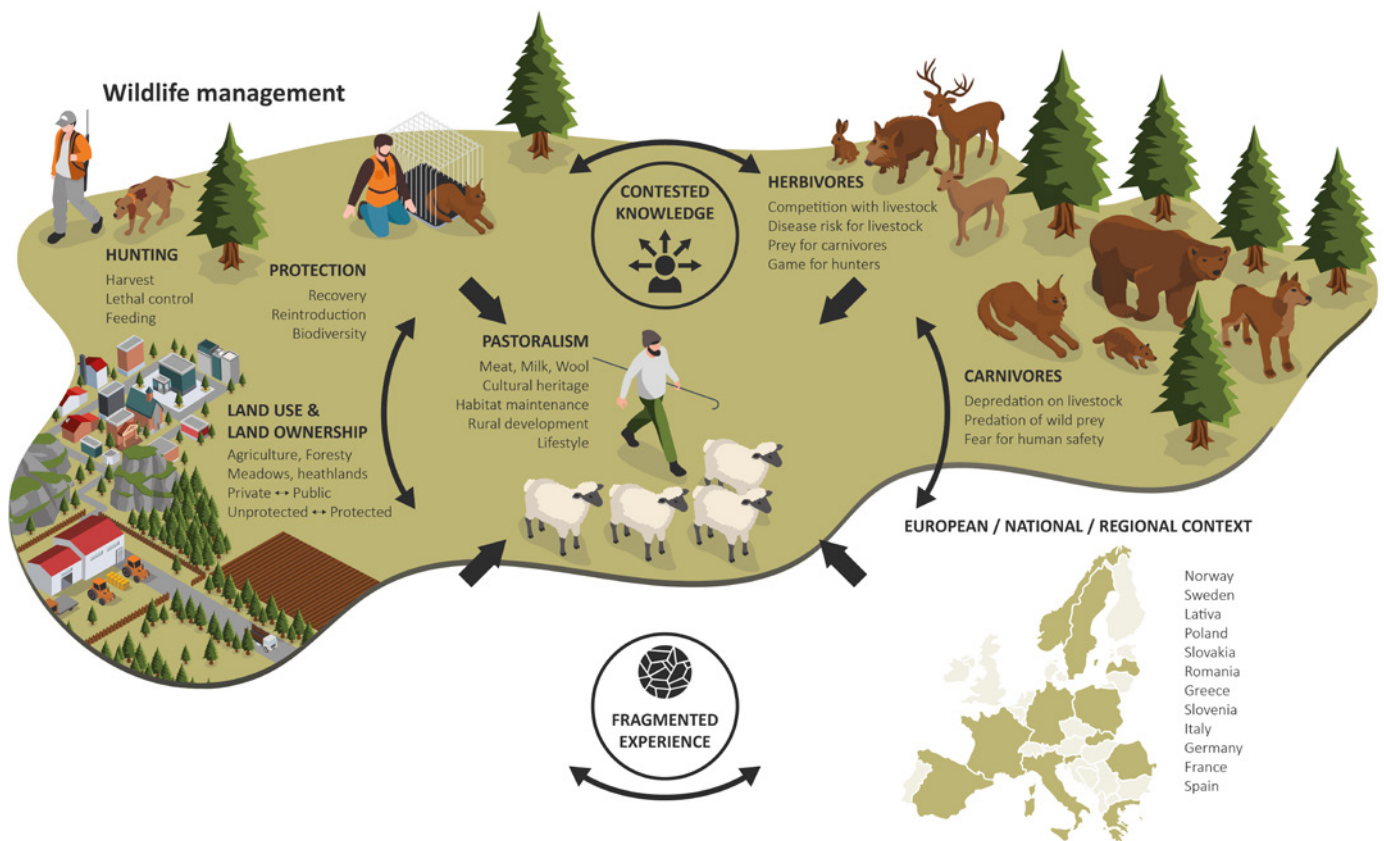


Fig. 1. A graphic representation of the project space (Source: CoCo consortium).

innovation) included a funding call² within the topic of “Agro-pastoral/outdoor livestock systems and wildlife management”³. In response, a diverse team of scientific partners and stakeholders put together an ambitious project proposal⁴, which was accepted, titled Co-creating coexistence (CoCo): Advancing policies, practices and stakeholder engagement for integrating wildlife and livestock into sustainable multi-functional landscapes in Europe.

The vision underpinning the CoCo project is the transformation of an entrenched conflict to a future state where pastoralism is valued, viable and enabled to coexist with wildlife in multi-functional landscapes. This will include targeted and efficient economic investments, greater policy coordination, less damage to livestock and reduced levels of social conflict between stakeholders. The hope is that the transformation will have come about through the integration of different knowledge systems via co-creation, recognition of multiple shared values and the mainstreaming of respectful and constructive forms of engagement, where diverse stakeholders engage in collective works towards common goals.

The overarching objective of the project is to co-create, integrate and consolidate a diversity of knowledge forms concerning pastoralism–wildlife interactions, from different scientific disciplines to traditional practices and personal experience across 12 case study countries (Fig. 1). This will be used as a basis for developing policy recommendations and tools for practitioners to promote sustainable coexistence in shared landscapes.

Pastoralism and wildlife

Pastoralism (extensive livestock raising outdoors) and High Nature Value farming⁵ (HNV) are important, though threatened, agricultural systems in Europe (Fig. 2). Compared to other land uses, they bring significant benefits for wildlife and contribute to preserving important habitats and species [7]. The relationship between these types of land use and wildlife can often be benign or even mutually reinforcing, although not without challenges. Some species compete with farmers, for example deer or wild boar (*Sus scrofa*) feeding on crops as well as wolves and

² <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/topic-search;callCode=HORIZON-CL6-2024-FARM2FORK-01>

³ https://cordis.europa.eu/programme/id/HORIZON_HORIZON-CL6-2024-FARM2FORK-01-1/en

⁴ <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101181958>

⁵ For a definition of HNV, see: <http://www.high-nature-value-farming.eu/what-is-hnv/>

other predators preying on livestock. Different stakeholders and interest groups often have diverse opinions on how wildlife should be managed, resulting in polarised social conflicts and high-level political debates [*Editor's note: see the News Roundup section on page 28 and in past issues of CDPnews*].

Pastoralism and HNV farming systems are under pressure in terms of their economic and social viability. Recovering wildlife populations add to the challenges faced by rural professions, including extra costs and workload due to predation and damage mitigation. This occurs in addition to existing challenges concerning, for example, power, wealth and social capital. Some of the major obstacles to addressing these challenges are conflicts between stakeholders and the contested nature of relevant knowledge as well as incoherence and inconsistency across policy sectors. The CoCo project is exploring such challenges through a multi-disciplinary, multi-actor approach with a strong social science representation and widespread stakeholder engagement aimed at co-creating a holistic form of knowledge with high legitimacy. This will form the basis for a 'Roadmap to coexistence' with recommendations for both policy and practice to help people and wildlife thrive side by side.

Project activities

CoCo is a research project designed to consolidate and build the knowledge base necessary to identify future pathways that can reconcile the needs of pastoralists with those of wildlife in shared European landscapes. In order to reduce wildlife-caused damage, calm tensions and reconcile the interests of pastoralists and wildlife, four activities will come together, namely:

- 1) The compilation and synthesis of multi-disciplinary scientific knowledge and different forms of experience-based knowledge.
- 2) The highly targeted collection and analysis of new data to robustly resolve areas of uncertain knowledge.
- 3) Novel processes of engagement between scientists and stakeholders that can reduce conflicts over knowledge such that a consolidated consensus emerges concerning both conflicts and the pathways and mechanisms that can mitigate or resolve them.
- 4) Promotion of understanding, cross-sectorial trust and coordination between different sectors engaged in agriculture, wildlife management and biodiversity conservation.



Fig. 2. Extensively grazed cattle at a farm in Slovakia (Photo: Robin Rigg).

The project is based on a set of 20 specific tasks, organised into eight work packages (Fig. 3), each of which plays a crucial role in addressing the interactions between pastoralism and wildlife management. Methods as diverse as systematic reviews, farm visits, face-to-face interviews, focus groups, questionnaires and modelling are being used to gain insights that will be integrated into policy recommendations for better standardisation, harmonisation and integration of pastoral and wildlife management systems. The process covers (a) the relationship between livestock husbandry practices and damage from wildlife; (b) ways to integrate wildlife management and pastoral management; (c) perceptions and values that different stakeholders have about the pastoralism-wildlife interface; (d) experience with different governance structures; (e) the potential of new and emerging technologies in both wildlife and pastoral management and monitoring; and (f) a cost-benefit analysis of different scenarios for pastoral and wildlife management. The specific tasks include:

- Analyse existing policy frameworks that govern agriculture, environment and wildlife management at various administrative levels.

- Examine the interactions between wildlife management and other land uses, such as agriculture and forestry, with a focus on how wildlife management affects pastoral systems and how these systems interact with wildlife.
- Map the diversity of extensive and semi-extensive pastoral systems currently in use in order to understand how they work and how they interact with wildlife.
- Interview livestock farmers and review the scientific literature regarding damage prevention practices in pastoral systems, particularly concerning large carnivores, to identify best practices and sustainable strategies.
- Observe and evaluate livestock protection measures used by pastoralists, particularly electric fences, guarding dogs and shepherding.
- Collect quantitative and qualitative data from pastoralists, hunters, landowners, environmentalists and other stakeholders in order to understand their perspectives and needs regarding wildlife interactions and associated social conflicts.

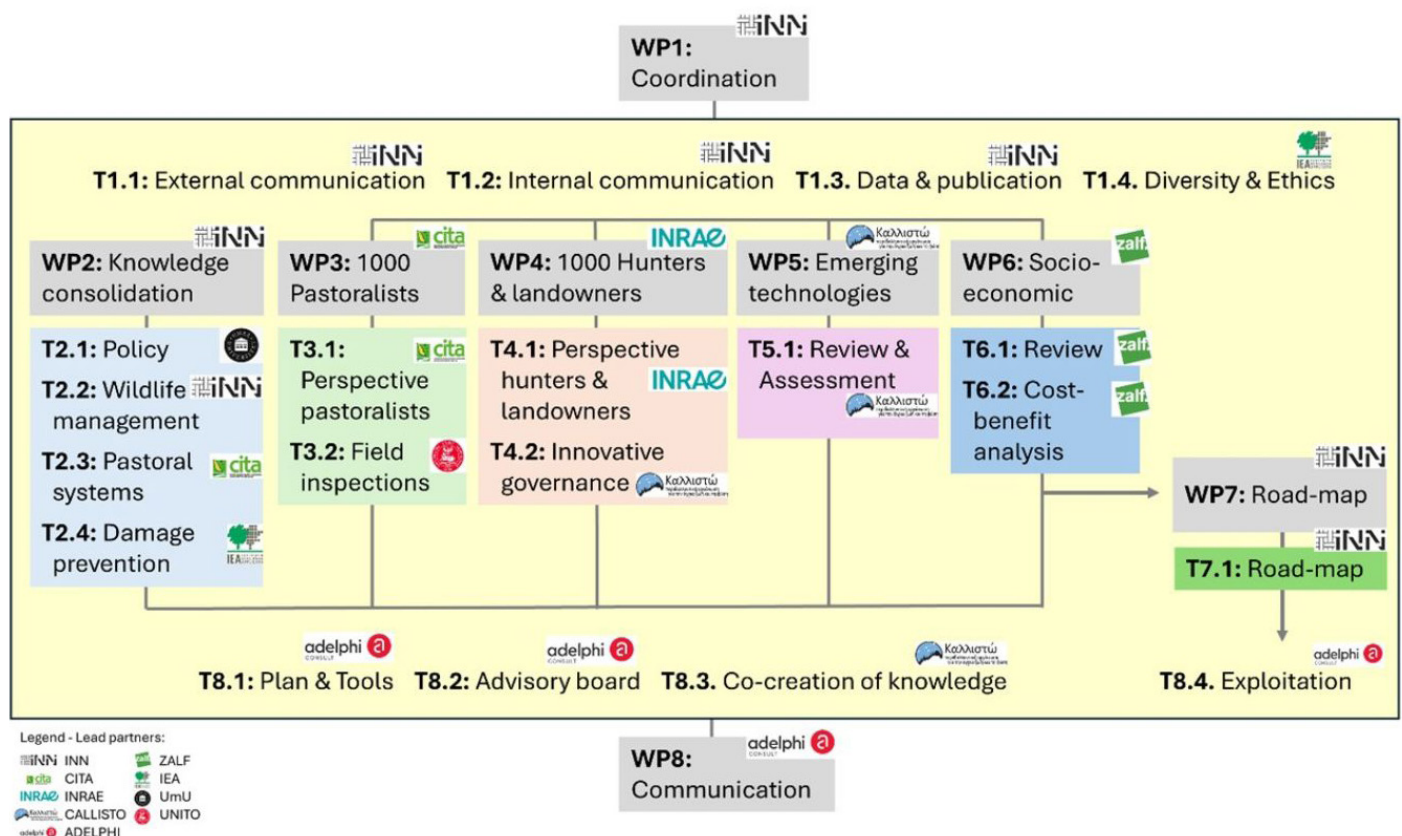


Fig. 3. The various work packages (WP) and tasks (T) of the project, showing the partner organisations leading their implementation (Source: CoCo consortium).

- Explore innovative governance structures involving stakeholder participation aimed at reducing social conflict by effectively managing wildlife–livestock interactions.
- Identify and evaluate the effectiveness and practical utility of emerging tools and technologies to help reduce conflicts and facilitate coexistence.
- Analyse current and new strategies to make both wildlife and pastoral systems more socio-economically sustainable.
- Conduct a cost–benefit analysis of strategies to reconcile conflicting objectives between wildlife management / conservation and pastoralism.
- Integrate the findings from preceding tasks into practical recommendations and guidelines, taking a holistic approach to balancing the interests of wildlife and pastoralism and integrating them within multi-functional landscapes.

Implementation

The CoCo project is implemented by a coalition of 17 research and stakeholder institutes and organisations (Fig. 4). Preparatory work began in November 2024, with a public launch in February 2025. In addition to the project partners, there is an advisory board composed of members from the EU Platform on coexistence between people and large carnivores and relevant scientific experts. Insights from the advisory board will help ensure that project results are used effectively in order to achieve real impact.

Further details and a full listing of CoCo consortium partners are available on the project website, where readers can sign up to receive a newsletter⁶. Regular updates are also posted on social media⁷. The CoCo project runs until 31st October 2027.

Acknowledgements

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Fig. 4. Participants of the working meeting "Farmer survey and beyond" held at CITA in Zaragoza, Spain, where the aims and methodological approaches of a pastoralist survey and various other work packages were discussed (Photo: CITA).

coordinated by the University of Inland Norway. Views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission.

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⁶ <https://cocoproject.eu/en/newsletter>

⁷ <https://www.linkedin.com/company/cocreating-coexistence/>

⁸ https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/horizon-europe_en