

Article

SOCIAL MEDIATION INITIATIVE

COEXISTENCE OF IBERIAN WOLVES AND EXTENSIVE LIVESTOCK FARMING

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1. Introduction

The conflict between pastoralism (“the use of extensive grazing on rangelands for livestock production”; FAO, 2001) and the wolf is probably the most paradigmatic regarding natural resources and biodiversity on the Iberian Peninsula. Coexistence, while enduring for millennia in Spain, has become a battlefield between two deeply antagonistic parties. This confrontation has led to a growing conflict, fuelled by symbolism of the wolf as the “beast”, that has now transcended the reality of predation on livestock to encompass the whole social sphere of rural areas.

By mid-2014, some people linked to the Entretantos Foundation who were deeply worried about this situation started to focus on the social aspects of the conflict rather than technical or political ways of

dealing with it. The foundation performed an internal social diagnosis¹ on the situation in the most conflicted areas of the country, especially the northwest quadrant including the regions of Galicia, Asturias, Cantabria and Castilla y León (Fig. 1). This assessment showed a deeply rooted conflict developing in a dangerous way. Consequently, the team decided to adopt a mediation perspective, using dialogue and collaborative tools to allow some narrowing of the distance between different sides in the conflict.

Following this path, the Entretantos Foundation designed a Social Mediation Initiative, aiming to defuse the conflict rather than to focus merely on solving the problems of coexistence. The backbone of this initiative consists of the development of a participato-

¹ This document, together with other documents developed during the process, has not been published or released for public consultation, so it remains internal to the working group. However, the Campo Grande Group is currently reviewing some of them in order to make them public on its website www.grupocampogrande.org.

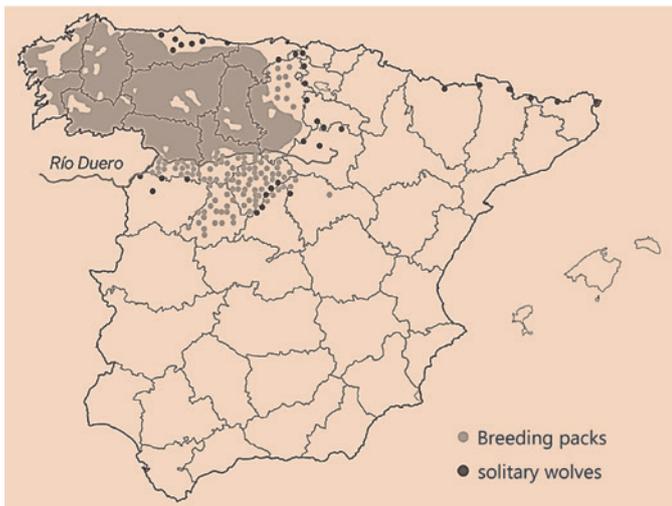


Fig. 1 Distribution map of the Iberian wolf in Spain according to Sánchez et al. (2018). The last official census was conducted in 2012–2014. (MAAMA, 2015)

ry nationwide think-tank, the Campo Grande Group, where people linked to several sectors related to the conflict participate. After more than two years of hard work, this platform has reached its first set of agreements and negotiated propositions to diffuse tension.

2. Not one conflict, but many

The conflict over the wolf in Spain affects biodiversity, conservation, management of natural resources and pastoralism but, on top of that, it mostly affects people who feel already threatened. Following our analysis, which is presented in the following sections, we describe the situation as an emerging situation loaded with complexity, symbolism and antagonism. It is a breeding ground for social outrage, with episodes of aggression that could be more harmful than any predation (Fig. 2).

When the Entretantos Foundation began using a social approach to the situation (Redorta, 2004), one of the first outcomes reached by diagnostic activities was the multidimensionality of the problem. The reality around wolves included a conglomerate of entangled conflicts, with very different backgrounds, agents and landscapes. This was not just about a single problem related to economics, communication, conservation, lack of understanding between stakeholders, ethics or management, but a very complex social-environmental issue with many visions, perceptions, empathy, certainties, discourses, communication and



Fig. 2 Coexistence between wolves and extensive farming has become a serious conflict in Spain.

even action structures. Mostly, these components are not intended to solve or de-escalate the conflict but to generate opinion and antagonism, without any place available to hold a negotiation or simply some peaceful dialogue.

The cartography of the conflict, also following Redorta (2004), displays at least 12 of 14 categories of conflict, including power, self-esteem, interests, legitimacy, rule of law, identity and personal values. This characterisation leads to consideration of the problem as a cluster of interlinked conflicts evolving around a central issue: the wolf. Henceforth, as we speak of the conflict, we will be referring to the whole cluster. This is a key issue to understand the degree of confrontation displayed by the situation.

It should be emphasised that, when we refer to “solving the conflict”, we are not promoting only technical solutions. We do not want simply working collaborative management models. On the contrary, we intend to address the confrontation and antagonism between different social sectors. The toolbox to develop this social approach is included in this mediation process, where agreements are just one outcome, a tool to reach wider goals, e.g. building trust, facilitating dialogue between conflicted parties, generating mutual empathy between both sides and finding consensus to help deflate the conflict.

On the other hand, the scenario emerging from initial contacts between stakeholders, sectors and social environments involved with the wolf showed a display of escalating emotions and actions creating a threatening situation for both extensive farming and wolf conservation, becoming personal, transcending to society and already approaching the maximum degree in a scale of conflict (Fig. 3). Conse-

quently, despite hundreds of initiatives developed around this topic, such as Living with Wolves by Ecologistas en Acción (www.ecologistasenaccion.org), the cooperation project Wolf: Wild Life and Farmers (www.redruralnacional.es) and the LIFE Lobo project in Andalusia (www.lifelobo.es), the positions of the different agents involved have become increasingly disparate, the confrontations increasingly virulent and solutions are definitely increasingly difficult to find.

The Foundation team identified three key aspects to face the challenge of the situation. Firstly, a conviction that no solution would be effective without a basic social agreement built upon dialogue. Secondly, a need for dialogue that can only be started if all parties agree on it. Finally, the assumption that any mediation initiative set in motion would require, as a preceding step, hard work to define, characterise and assess the different conflicts around the wolf.

3. Background assessment

To meet this assumption, in January–March 2016 the Entretantos Foundation team carried out 27 direct interviews (some with groups of 2–3 people) with social agents interacting with the conflict. The selection of interviewees leaned mostly on the previous involvement of Entretantos with pastoralists and an intimate knowledge of networks involving the main stakeholders. The team first classified these agents according to the following categories: conservationists linked to areas with attacks, country-wide conservationists, professional agricultural organisations, farmers’ associations in areas with attacks, individual farmers and shepherds with experience dealing with attacks, researchers, and experts. Selecting

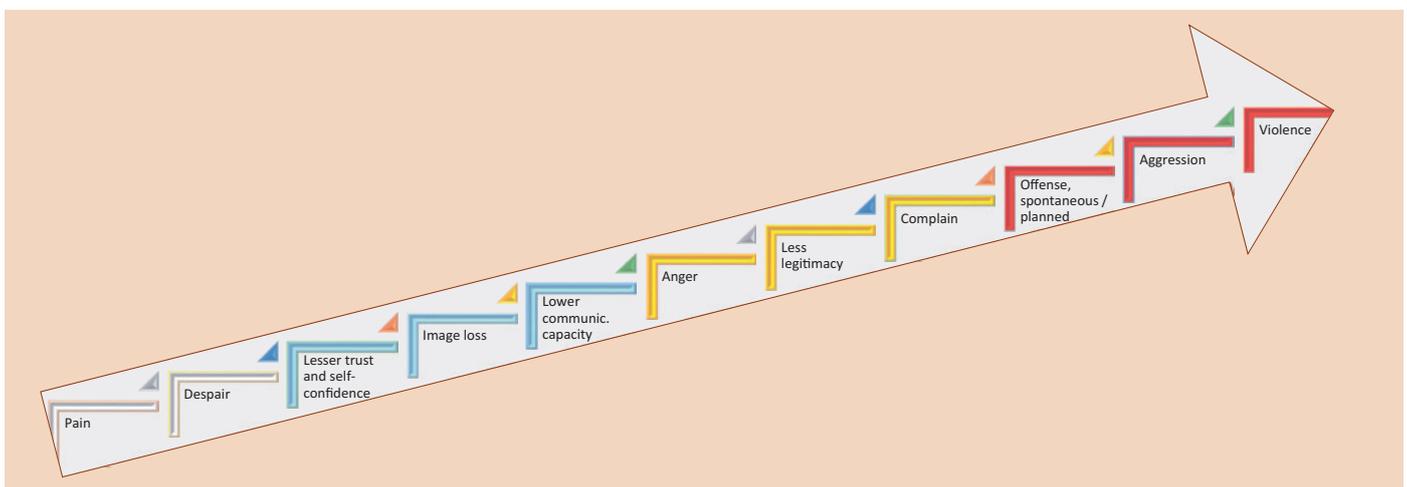


Fig. 3 Conflict escalation depicted by Fundación Entretantos, inspired by Redorta (2004).



Fig. 4 Simplified map of actors in the conflict. The map represents both sides of the conflict (right and left) and other agents involved. The positioning of the different agents and their relationships contributes to the complexity of the problem.

(Source: Fundación Entretantos)

individual participants was a dynamic process, starting with the most significant local stakeholders and asking them for people whose voice should be heard regarding this conflict. Step by step, the team cast a wide net in which all major players, at each local level, were included (Fig. 4).

Face-to-face interviews (some via videoconference) were performed in the provinces of Salamanca, León (northern region), Asturias, Cantabria and Madrid. These provinces were chosen mainly for their level of conflict. We avoided the Galicia region, where another working group (O Xan) was already developing its work. Interviews were designed following a script focused on positioning and perspectives of the conflict emanating from people questioned. Each interview was conducted by two people, without recording equipment (to improve trust). Notes taken during interviews were later processed and analysed using a discourse analysis tool (Conde, 2009) to extract the representation and social perception of the conflict and fine-grain mapping of the areas in conflict. The process began with a transcription, as accurate as possible, of the whole interview. The interviewer then performed a text review to assess the categories of organization of the discourses, deconstruct the text

in elemental analysis units, regroup the data, assign categories and, finally, analyse and interpret.

4. A dialogue group

The first real outcome of this process has been the constitution and facilitation of the Campo Grande Group (CGG). This dialogue group is the main working tool to pursue dialogue, reflection, analysis and creative solutions to the conflict. It answers the need for a neutral space to talk, establish positions, confrontation and disagreement in a safe and independent mode.

The CGG was planned with a balanced composition of 35 people drawn from conservationist organisations (10), researchers and experts (7), hunters (2), farmers (8 men and 2 women), and professional agrarian organisations (2), representing different positions and interests. The group was completed with six facilitators from the Entretantos Foundation to mediate and support the group. The group started work in spring 2016, with one-day meetings complemented with online working (mostly through online forms and collaborative documents). So far eight meetings have been held, each attended by 18 to 25 people (Figs. 5 and 6).

The mission of the CGG consists of developing the background to facilitate alternatives promoting long-term coexistence between extensive livestock farming and wild wolf populations. It is a strong commitment for the group's members, coming out of their personal and collective comfort zones around wolf issues, to adopt a position of dialogue out of bravery and generosity. The vision of the group is a committed, highly skilled and expert think tank, sympathetic and sensitive to the reality of people dealing with conflict on a daily basis. The group should generate analysis, debate and reflection, while diagnosing the current situation and developing viable solutions. The long-term target of the CGG is to produce agreements promoting compatibility between extensive farming and wild populations of Iberian wolves in a way that can be both useful and trustworthy. This target is formulated out of preconceived ideas, based on respect to people (whether they are involved in farming, tourism, conservation or research) and displaying a solid scientific foundation in their proposals and solutions.

The roadmap of the group is also a task performed within the process. In the first stage, the develop-



Fig. 5 Public presentation of the Campo Grande Grupo at the Royal Botanic Garden of Madrid. (Photo: Fundación Entretantos)

ment of this roadmap, there was a desire among CGG members to supplement the group's composition, seeking more voices committed to finding solutions rather than complaints, moans and claims. However, the main idea was always to reach an agreement that could be presented to both sides of the conflict, and ultimately to government agencies, showing fair, technically viable and socially acceptable suggestions that may help to overcome the state of confrontation. However, reaching agreements from such different points of view is not at all easy. The group needed to prepare itself for a long and probing dialogue, dealing with different, often deep-rooted positions. Professional facilitation and training were key at this point to establish a friendly scenario where dialogue was meant to develop. Before tackling the most conflicted issues, it was helpful firstly to analyse the situation together and build a shared scenario, setting aside the most toxic and powerful constraints.

These preparatory tasks were important for the group dynamics, as they helped to build trust and empathy among all participants. The work included identifying and mapping the complete set of actors involved, trying to address the complex relationships between them. In the second stage, the group analysed different discourses with a clear task in mind: to identify and catalogue stereotypes, red lines and constraints, addressed to the actual situation of social conflict. Using the outcomes of these analyses, the CGG then started to deconstruct and dismantle myths and clichés, while identifying good practices already existent in the field that could be the basis for new ideas and solutions suitable for both sides. These ideas would establish a common ground,



Fig. 6 Meeting in Valladolid July 17. (Photo: Fundación Entretantos)

boosting the interest of both sides whilst securing the dialogue.

5. Analysing the conflict

Testimonies gathered in the diagnostic phase were included in a Social Perception Report, distributed to all CGG members and establishing a baseline of conflict-related discourses, acknowledging the diversity of stakeholders and approaches. The testimonies were fundamental for the group to analyse different discourses related to the conflict and typifying the diversity of interests and actors. The most notable outcomes of this analysis were the above-mentioned symbolic power of the wolf, with various contrasting characteristics attributed to the animal by both sides of the conflict. The second conclusion was the neat polarisation of the conflict into two sides, displayed not from an objective basis but from the perception of others as opponents. The group also established the need for more reliable assessment of data about wolf attacks on livestock, resultant damages and their claims. Improved availability and accessibility of scientific data and research outcomes, along with greater transparency, emerged as key demands for properly assessing the situation in the field.

The result of these analyses was a list of the main topics related to the conflict:

1. Symbolic role of the wolf;
2. Polarisation in two neat fronts;
3. Accountability of attacks;
4. Vision about compatibility between livestock and wolves;

5. The impact of economics: damages, benefits, compensations, etc.;
6. Pastoralist management systems and prevention measures;
7. Wolf population control;
8. Population data and census;
9. Land planning related aspects;
10. The role of mass media;
11. A vision of the future.

This list formed the basis for planning dialogue sessions, designed to discuss each topic in detail in an effort to draw conclusions and make specific proposals. The topic list was started by exploring questions about the development of the conflict, for instance the symbolic treatment of the animal or polarisation of the debate into two sides, not supported by objective reasons but rather from perceiving, both individually and collectively, all other positions as confrontational. The question of coexistence was raised from different perspectives: the compatibility between wolves and livestock, pastoralist management systems, measures to prevent predation, etc. (Fig. 7). Other sets of topics focused on economic aspects such as damage, benefits and compensation, also embedded in the complex matrix of rural activity, including tourism, hunting and agriculture.



Fig. 7 Damage prevention measures, such as guardian dogs are a common source of dissensus. (Photo: Fundación Entretantos)

The group agreed to discuss technical issues, including the accuracy and reliability of data, both ecological (population status, wolf movements) and concerning attacks (number, losses, damages), the need to control wolf populations or possible alternatives and the importance of land planning and land management to address the conflict. The topic list also included some transversal issues, such as the role of the

media, including their influence on public opinion. Finally, the last topic was a vision of the future and realistic possibilities of solving, or at least de-escalating, the conflict.

6. Preconceptions, stereotypes and clichés

Systematic compilation of different social discourses is a key to elucidate the main fields of interest but also first step in identifying and analysing clichés. Common statements and stereotypes, far from contributing to smoothing conflicts, are often the main arguments supporting extreme positions and confrontation. Such clichés are often preconceptions, repeated over and over again by either side, held as true without need for corroboration, fed to the press and media, written-up in leaflets and used to promote their positions. These clichés often state an extreme positioning, a response to the other side's aggression, whilst giving feedback to the conflict in a never-ending positive loop.

Mediation also focuses in a critical analysis of clichés as a way to facilitate dialogue and understanding between sides. This work starts on extreme headlines, e.g.: “farmers lie about the attacks”, “cohabitation is impossible”, “conservationists are urbanites and do not want farmers in the countryside”, “most attacks are performed by feral dogs”, “Common Agricultural Policies are already paying for coexistence with wolves”, etc. These arguments are often heard in interviews or read in headlines. The first list of clichés came from interviews during the initial assessment stage. The CGG has analysed the origin of these clichés, discussed the pertinent facts and elaborated alternative, better-informed sentences. This work was done during two sessions deconstructing each of the stereotypes. The mechanism was simple: the facilitation team presented each cliché to the group, the people affected by the cliché explained their position and how the stereotype was prejudicial or harmful. Facts and research around the topic were presented if necessary. Finally, after the discussion, the group reached an agreement on how the current topic should be addressed to avoid inaccurate statements and discrimination (Table 1). The goal of this work is providing solid arguments, acting as levers to assimilate, deconstruct and deactivate mantra-like clichés, deeply embedded in the collective mind of the sectors involved.

Table 1. Outline of cliché analysis performed by the Campo Grande Group.

Cliché	Origin	Analysis	Proposal
The countryside is better without livestock (or people).	Some conservationists and rewilding advocates make such statements.	The Spanish countryside has been grazed since the Neolithic and this should continue.	Show interest in keeping shepherds in the countryside, support coexistence, agroecology and high-quality products.
Academics and conservationists know nothing about how things really work.	Farmers think only people living with them in the countryside know how to deal with their environment.	Scientific fieldwork is difficult and underrated.	Promote participatory science, increase efforts to disseminate results. Scientists and farmers should get to know each other.
Farmers are greedy, conservationists are greedy scientists are cheap sell-outs.	Everybody thinks that their enemy is only interested in money.	Neither farmers, conservationists or scientists make a lot of money from their work.	Focus on professionalism, quality and relevance of each agent involved.
Farmers are careless and they cheat.	Some conservationists think that compensation is paid to cheaters and preventive measures will solve the problem.	Compensation barely pays for direct costs, it does not cover indirect costs (e.g. stress, disturbance).	Design and implement better compensation tools, promote better preventive measures.
Nobody cares about us (farmers).	Farmers feel victimised, that conservationists and other agents do not care about their pain and struggle.	Conservation groups are starting to understand the importance of High Nature Value farming.	Help conservationists valorise the contribution of pastoralism to biodiversity, promote mutual understanding.
Wolf-watching is going to be a lifesaver for rural economies.	Some conservationists think that specialised tourism could be an alternative to traditional farming.	Wolf-watching is growing but only in certain areas and cannot be a global alternative to farming.	Consider tourism as a complementary activity, involve farmers and their activities in tourism packages, redistribute revenues.
The wolf is an excuse to manipulate farmers.	Conservationists think that wolf predation on livestock is not a major issue and farmers are manipulated to focus on it.	Farmers are aware of other problems they face, but predation makes the situation very difficult for some of them.	Distinguish predation from other issues, avoid disrespecting farmers and misusing the conflict for other interests.
The wolf is an icon of a vibrant natural world.	The great charisma of the wolf makes it a powerful image, but in Spain wolves live in human-dominated landscapes.	Communities suffering attacks consider it painful to be confronted by such imagery.	Keep symbols out of the conflict.

7. Red lines: constraints, blockages and dissension

After addressing clichés, the CGG focused on analysing dissension and blockage. There are some strong topics on which neither side is willing to back down, obstructing any possible solution to the conflict. An analysis was presented to the group in another internal document, describing these blockages and classifying them in seven categories. This analysis also established red lines: positions that the different sectors will not cross, highlighting the main points of conflict escalation and polarisation of discourses. The seven categories were:

1. Damage assessment;
2. Damage reduction and prevention measures;
3. Economic tools for damage compensation;
4. Wolf population control;
5. Census and scientific knowledge of the species and its territories;
6. Legal status of the wolf;
7. Wolf-related tourism.

These topics fuelled the main debates inside the GCG and, eventually, facilitated the first agreements achieved by the group. The outcomes of these discussions also provided feedback to the previous stages, generating dialogue dynamics that soon led to

more agreements and to show clearly the red lines: points where agreement was impossible (at least for now). By this point, the group had achieved sufficient agreement to establish a strong basis for addressing the conflict and enough confidence to keep debating (Fig. 8). The main dynamic of the group was strong and stable, and the results were solid.

8. Proposals, action, future

In August 2018 the Campo Grande Group achieved a second milestone: releasing a *Declaration of the Campo Grande Group*² (CGG, 2018), including the main agreements together with their nuances and degree of consensus (not always complete) to address each of the blockages and red lines. All participants individually signed the Declaration, which is now in the process of being discussed and endorsed by organisations. Participants in the Declaration were allowed by the group to freely choose their signature as individuals or organisations. However, their commitment is to deliver, discuss and advocate for the Declaration to be endorsed or, at least, accepted, by the main stakeholder organisations (Fig. 9).

The main outcomes of this work, besides actually reaching the first set of agreements displayed in the document, are truly related to the quality of the participatory process itself. Clearly, the most significant

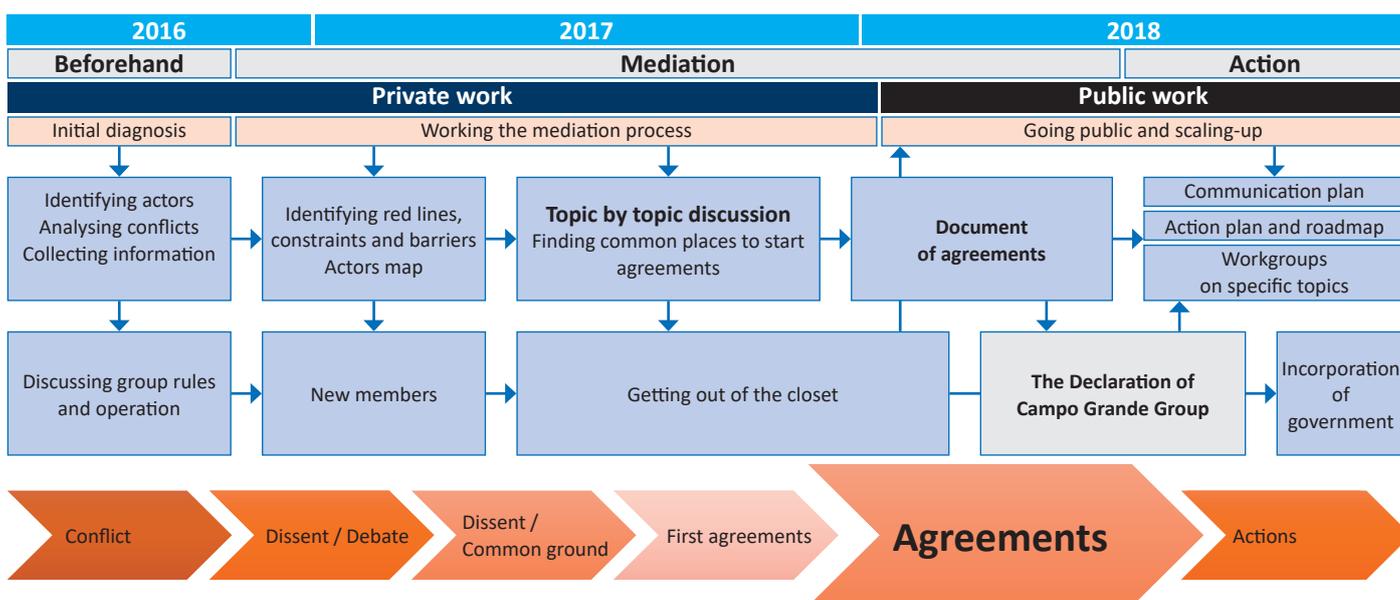


Fig.8 Operation of the Campo Grande Group.

(Source: Fundación Entretantos)

² The Declaration can be downloaded from the Campo Grande Group website. The direct link for the English version is: http://www.grupocampogrande.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/DeclaracionGCG_v3_eng.pdf



Fig. 9 Poster advertising of the final meeting, February 2019.

advance is that the parties involved in the conflict have been able to debate freely, in a climate of respect, mutual trust, and with a will to solve the problem. Moreover, the formulation and public presentation of the Declaration shows that it is possible to reach viable agreements between heavily confronted sides in such a polarised conflict. Everyone involved in the dialogue has modified his

or her initial position to reach consensus and provide a basis for progress. The greatest innovation displayed by this initiative is creating a secure environment for dialogue and negotiation. The availability of such a safe place is the foundation for designing specific management measures and overcoming the constraints arising in the course of its implementation.

After releasing the Declaration, the CGG started a communication campaign to disseminate both the document and the participatory methodology behind it. The group has also set in motion new lines of work, including development of new practical initiatives that could contribute to improving the main proposals. Three workgroups are in charge of three different lines of work, considered instrumental for conflict resolution: declaration of damages, damage assessment protocols and management measures. A fourth group is entrusted to analyse and compare regional governmental wolf management plans, suggesting specific amendments to improve their usefulness as well as coherence both among the plans and with CGG proposals. The CGG is organising this work by designing an Action Plan, complemented by a Communication Plan.

The social mediation initiative is facing a major challenge in going public on dialogue and negotiation between conflicted sides. Establishing a website for the group (www.grupocampogrande.org) was a great step forward. As part of the process of going public, in February 2019 the CGG held a workshop which was attended by more than 80 guests from the whole spectrum of stakeholders' organisations. This included a presentation supported by an interactive theatre, dialogue between parties and public debates, with the outcomes to be displayed on the website.

The group is now prepared to incorporate government bodies and other stakeholders that were not part of the initial stages. The involvement of government agencies (at both regional and national levels) is key to the continued development of the group. They were not involved in the early stages of the group in order to avoid focusing the debate on what the government should do. After the first agreements, their participation is essential to achieve concrete measures for improvement, and the group is aware of this fact. The facilitation team has already initiated contact with some key government bodies to assess their potential role and participation in the group. In any case, the freedom, trust and generosity displayed by all participants have proven to be instrumental in its success, demonstrating that, through a properly facilitated process, it is possible to reach agreement between pastoralists and other stakeholders. The next steps will include replication of the process at the local level in different areas, when we will see if the approach is also suitable in less controlled environments dealing directly with wolf attacks.

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