

YOUTHS' ATTITUDE AND AWARENESS TOWARDS HUMAN-WILDLIFE INTERACTIONS IN THE ALPS

PROMOTING KNOWLEDGE AND PARTICIPATION TO TURN CONFLICTS INTO OPPORTUNITIES

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The Alpine area is the scene of continuous interactions between human activities and wildlife, which may turn into concrete conflicts among affected stakeholders.

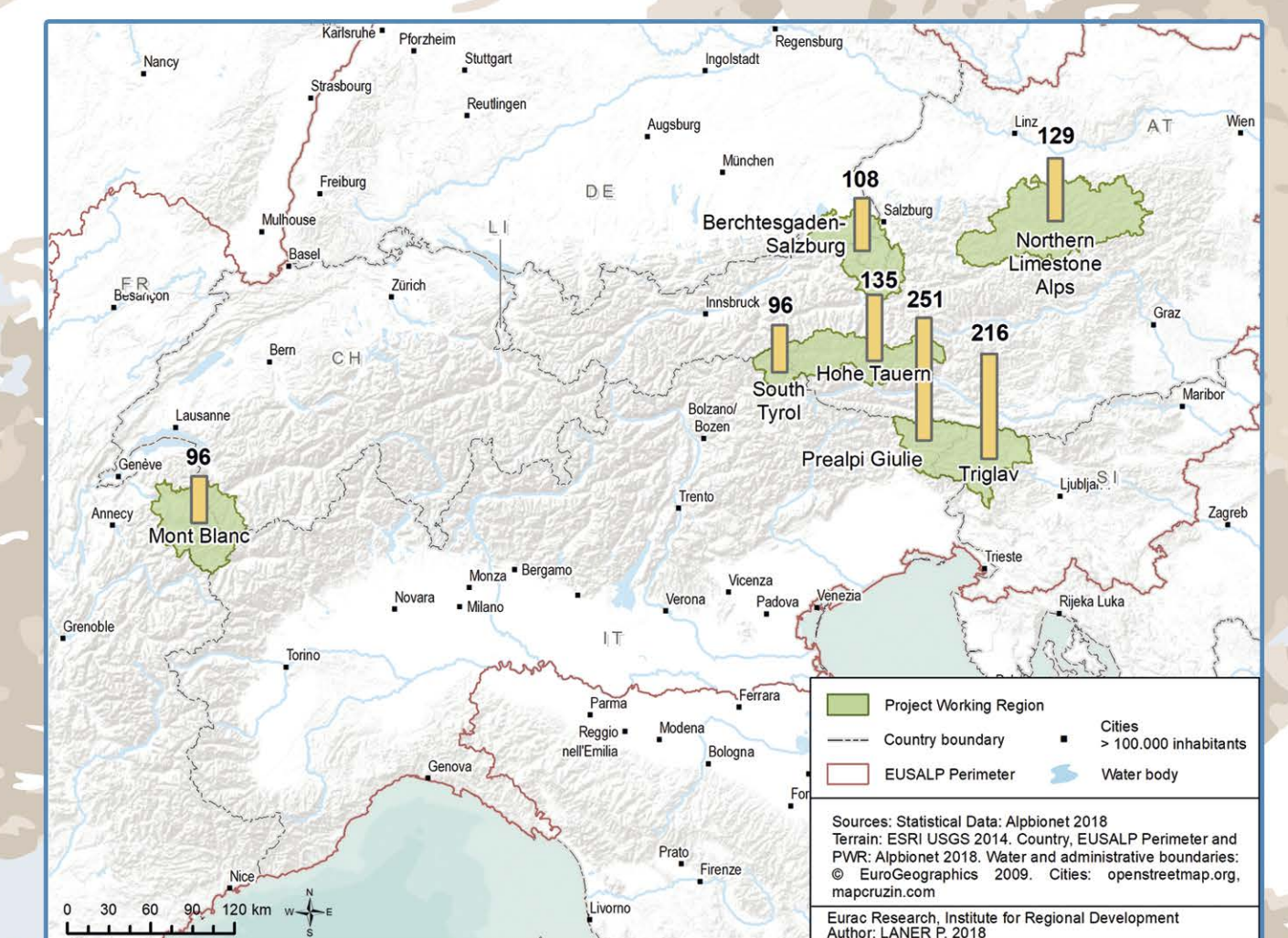
Administrators, experts, SPECIAL INTERESTED GROUPS, the economic sector and the local communities are directly involved, although often their different needs and opinions are not properly taken into consideration. Human-wildlife interactions deal not only with tangible ecological and economic features, but also with social values, cultural and emotional elements. In the framework of the ALPBIONET2030 project, we identified local and transnational human-wildlife interactions throughout the Alpine area, in five project-working regions (PWR, SEE MAP). MOST OF THEM have a direct effect on the local wildlife presence and on the local ecological network. Since ALPBIONET2030 points to the future of the Alpine society and to the harmonization of wildlife management also to prevent conflicts, we believed in the importance of involving the young side of the society to know their perception of wildlife in the Alps and their attitude towards current interactions.

Their response could help local administrators to turn education activities and policies to reframe biodiversity challenges.

To get this purpose, a questionnaire was sent to high school students living in the project working regions of ALPBIONET2030.

We collected more than 1000 questionnaires in the period from November 2017 to February 2018, from France to Slovenia.

NUMBER OF QUESTIONNAIRES PER PWR



OUTDOOR SPORT ACTIVITIES PARAGLIDING



Anthropogenic disturbance of wildlife is of growing conservation concern, but we lack comprehensive approaches of its multiple negative effects. We found out several results of disturbance by outdoor sports activities on free-ranging alpine animals. Ski touring, snowshoeing, paragliding, MTB freeride are just some of outdoor sport activities addressed of causing disturbance to wildlife and its behavior and at the same time affecting long-lasting habits (mushrooms picking, hunting) of people living in mountain areas. Given the differing levels of campaign provided by Alpine Countries to inform people about these issues, data recorded in the survey show a low awareness of the problem among students. 89,2 % of young people agree that wild species are fundamental to sustain biodiversity and for 90 % of them agree that wildlife presence gives the impression to live in an intact nature. However only the 48,5% are aware that outdoor activities may disturb wildlife. Information should be addressed to the different groups of interest that are involved in the topic (tourists, alpine guides, ski teachers, foresters, schools and protected areas). These informative campaigns should state clearly why, where and when the wildlife should be protected from human disturbances. Many potential impacts to wildlife can be reduced by ensuring that trails/routes avoid the most sensitive habitats, including those hosting rare and protected species.

OUTDOOR SPORT ACTIVITIES MTB



LARGE CARNIVORES

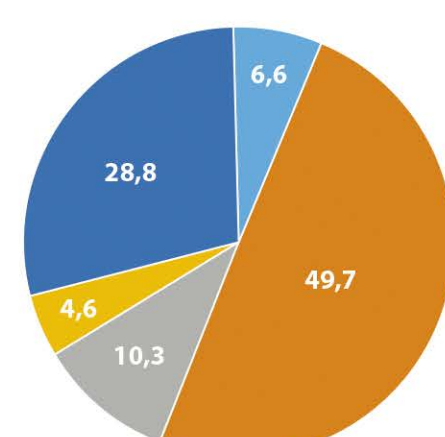


After centuries of eradication, in many areas of the Alps, the three main wild-life species of large carnivores (brown bear, grey wolf and Eurasian lynx) have returned to their original territories. The return of these species has found local communities unprepared. Events of livestock predation have occurred due to dispersal activities of the individuals of these species. The absence of prevention systems (such as electrified fences) to protect the local economic activities has given free space to the predation episodes with great social and ecological consequences.

More than 60% of the surveyed high-school students have an idea of large carnivores as referred to "intact nature" and "biodiversity". Students who live in the areas where the bear has appeared but is not yet a stable presence (Tignes) express the idea of "danger". Regarding the acceptance of this "new" presence, many students reply of feeling "in harmony with nature" and "excited", while only a minor part is "fearful". This data demonstrates the need to invest more in information, education, and prevention about large carnivores.

WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT A BEAR, WHAT IS THE FIRST THING THAT COMES TO YOUR MIND?

Intact Nature Danger Biodiversity
Fairytales and Legends Circus / Zoo

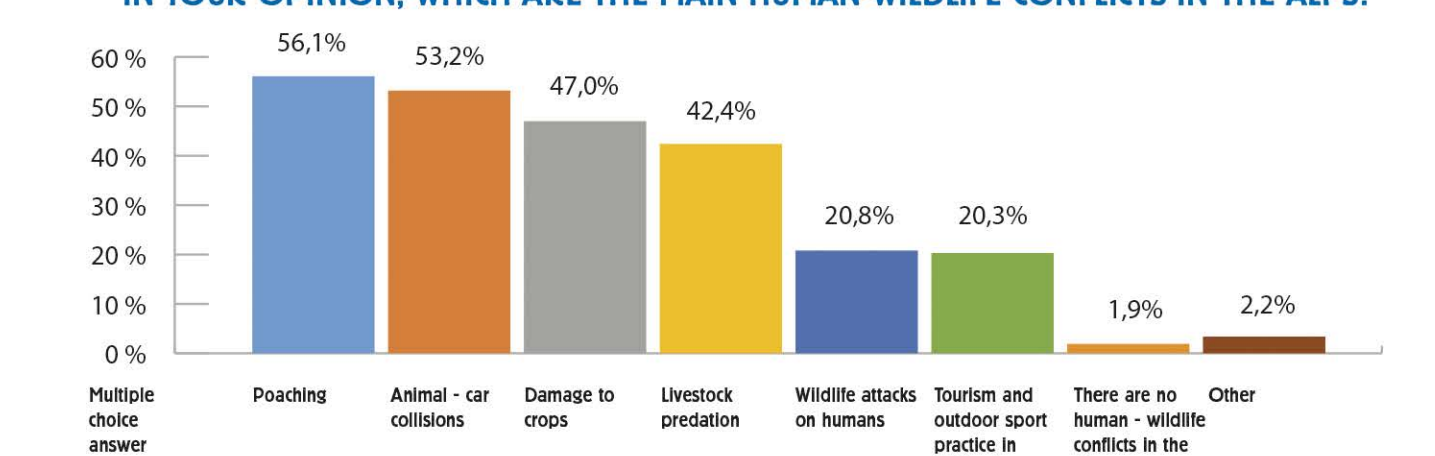


POACHING



We intend poaching as the illegal hunting or capturing of wild or protected animals, usually associated with land use rights, where such practices are forbidden, through shooting, trapping or poisoning. Poaching is stated as a serious threat to many wildlife species inside or outside of protected areas. Market hunters and unregulated sportsmen have limited many wildlife species in their natural ranges or depleted in numbers, sometimes to the point of extinction. The illegal use of poisoned bait, for instance, is one of the most serious threats to wolf conservation and it is a dangerous practice for a large number of other animals, such as small carnivores, birds and domestic dogs. High-school students demonstrate a significant awareness of the problem since 56% of them consider it as one of the main problems in the Alps. The contrast to this criminal activity must be the priority of local and national institutions, hunters, forest guards and rangers working inside and outside protected areas.

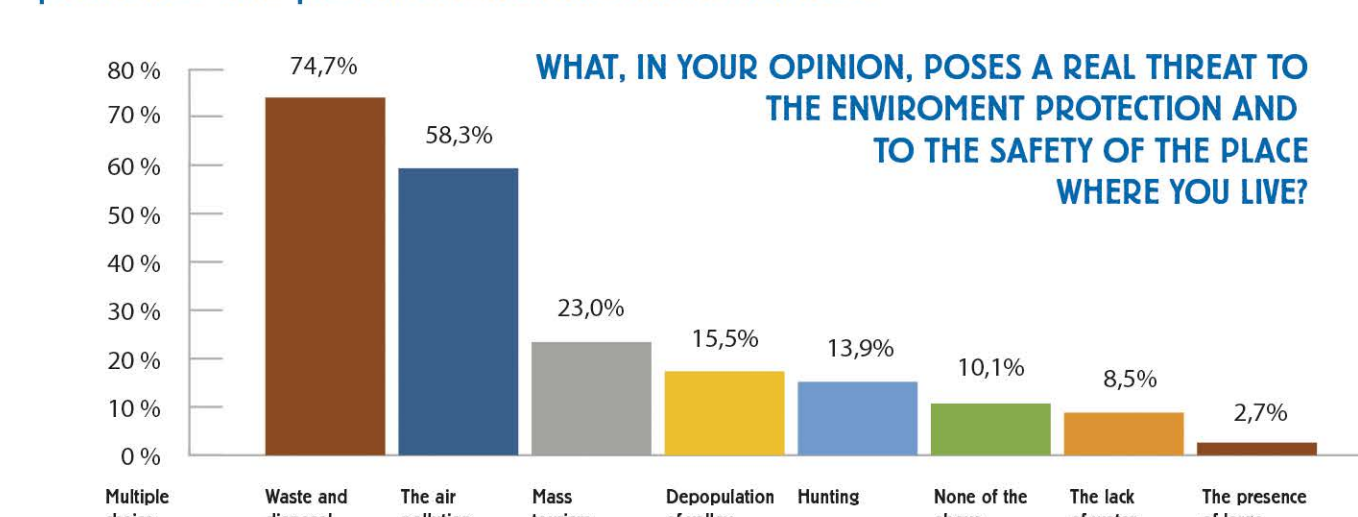
IN YOUR OPINION, WHICH ARE THE MAIN HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICTS IN THE ALPS?



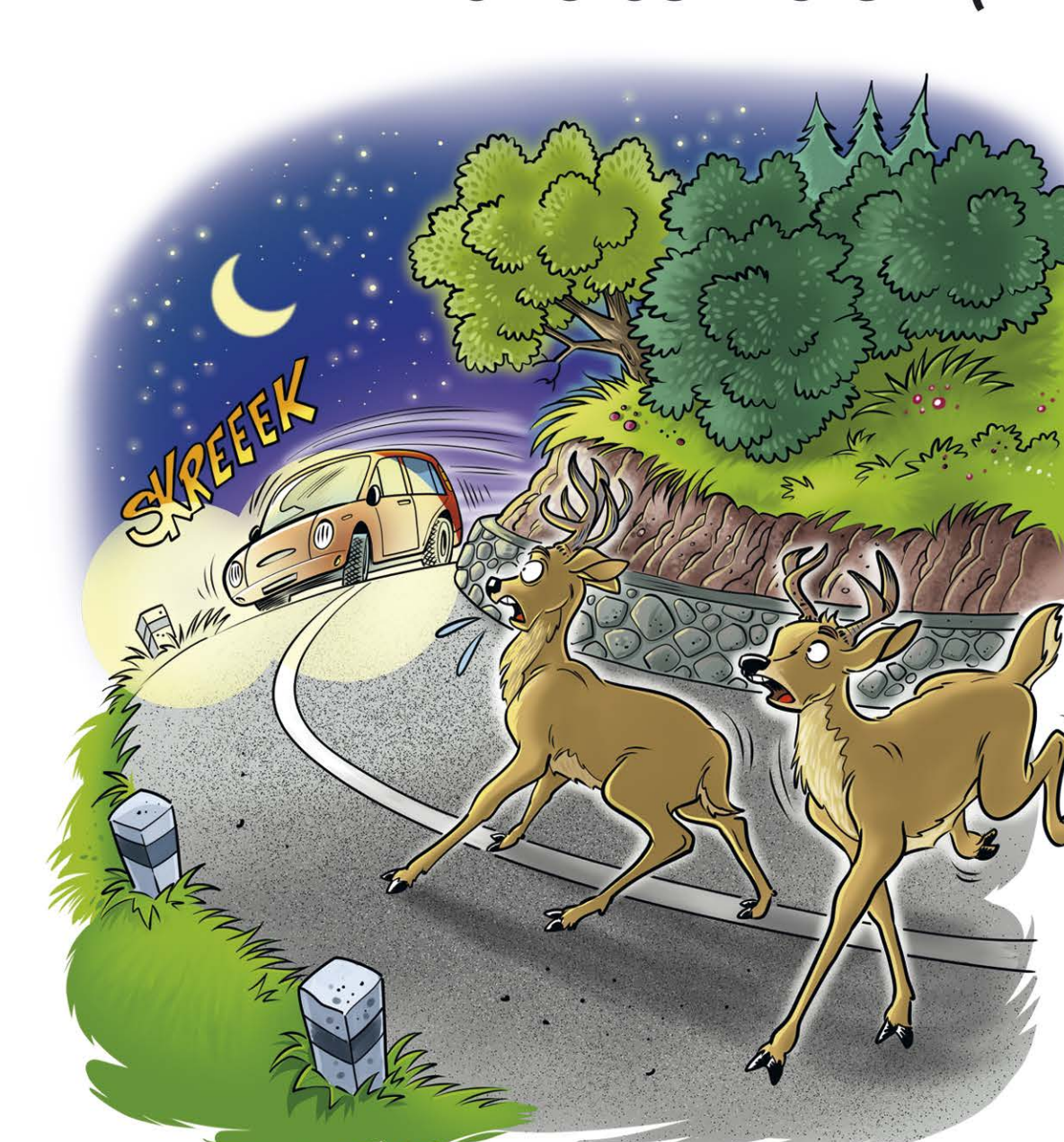
PASTURES



In the whole of the Alpine arc, transhumances are a benefit both for ecological connectivity and for biodiversity. Grazing activity permits the preservation of traditional pastures and contributes to keeping habitats connected. Transhumances of huge flocks have been identified as a major problem for many stakeholders such as hunters, landowners and livestock breeders. They pointed out different problems such as droppings and flattened grass and plants, crop damages, disturbance to private ownership and damages to weeds. In order to maintain a farming population in these difficult and increasingly depopulated areas, we are trying to map transhumances in some areas (Prealpi Giulie) to identify the location of main human-wildlife interactions. 15.5 % of surveyed students believe that depopulation of the mountain areas is a threat to the environment protection. The education system should be a vehicle to prepare young people to enter in and develop the local economy, but only if the protection and preservation of mountain activities will be enhanced.



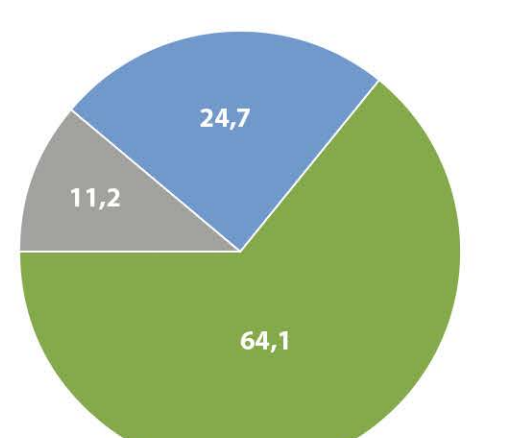
ANIMAL - VEHICLES COLLISION (AVC)



Is the deer that cross a road or the road that cuts a forest? The need for moving and connection with the other individuals of a species is a common necessity of both humans and wildlife. The development of roads alter and isolate habitats and populations, deterring the movement of wildlife and resulting in extensive wildlife mortality. AVC have also important health and traffic impacts, by killing thousands and injuring tens of thousands of people annually. Prevention measures for this conflict have positive outcomes for both humans and wildlife and can contribute to the development of an attitude towards wildlife that includes also animals' needs. Among surveyed youths, there is a high awareness of the AVC issue (more than 50% of the students consider it as one of the main conflicts in the Alps). The data is supported by a high knowledge (64.1%) about ecological connectivity, meaning that the new generations are already aware of the fact that we need to develop an integrated network of roads, ecological corridors, urban and green areas to allow the coexistence of wildlife and humans.

ACCORDING TO YOUR KNOWLEDGE AND OPINION WHAT DO YOU THINK "ECOLOGICAL CONNECTIVITY" MEANS?

- It is when humans have to adapt to wildlife needs and retire from some territories which are important wildlife survival.
- It is a concept which aims at allowing the coexistence of wildlife and humans, developing an integrated network of roads, ecological corridors, urban areas and green areas.
- It is when cities and countryside are connected through a network of green paths where people can freely ride and walk.



Identifying the main drivers of current conflicts and promote an approach "towards coexistence" can help people to increase their acceptance of wildlife and of the local interactions with human activities.

Cooperation is the key to work towards solutions that can, at the same time, maximize conservation success and reduce the socioeconomic impact of conflicts. The involvement of young generations in this process, pointing at knowing and increasing their positive attitude and awareness towards wildlife related issue is one of the major challenges, but also a great opportunity, to define new strategies for human-wildlife coexistence.