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## To Hunt or to Protect? Discourse-coalitions in the Polish Wolf Management

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### Abstract

After the political transformation in Poland in 1989, the management of the wolf (*Canis lupus*) became strongly debated. The discussions concerned the need to protect the wolf, methods of protection and actors to be involved. Increasing social pressure resulted in a series of legal changes leading to the full protection of the species in 1998. Using the concept of discourse coalitions, we distinguished two groups of actors, which argued for or against changes of wolf policy. We also investigated the story-lines regarding the wolf and its management to find out which of them was institutionalised through the state wolf policy. Engaging with the literature on discursive politics of wildlife conservation, we suggest that the discourse coalition supporting wolf conservation successfully challenged the dominant vision of wolves by creating a new counter-discourse and promoting it, which led to a bottom-up institutional change. The discourse coalition supporting the status quo lacked discursive power to protect existing institutions. Our results contribute to the literature on human-carnivore coexistence by exploring socio-cultural factors related to the major institutional change of carnivore policy and by building capacity to critically evaluate and transcend existing paradigms for a better human-carnivore coexistence.

**Keywords:** story-lines, wolf protection, carnivore management, human-carnivore coexistence, conservation policy, conservation conflict

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, wolf (*Canis lupus*) populations in Europe and in the USA have increased and the question of wolf management has become arguably one of the most discussed issues regarding biodiversity conservation (Stöhr and Coimbra 2013; Drenthen 2015; Olson et al. 2015). In Europe, wolf restitution is mainly associated with the implementation of the European legislation in this respect, which created a top-down governance mechanism requiring Member States to ensure a

favourable conservation status of wolves with their territories. Consequently, social studies on wolf-related conflicts in Europe focus on the effects of this top-down policy-making and on the countries where wolves reappeared after decades of being absent in the ecosystems. These studies highlight local opposition, bring up different attitudes towards wolves among urban and rural actors, and tend to advocate participatory governance balancing local, national and international interests (Campion-Vincent 2005; Ratamäki 2008; Sjölander-Lindqvist et al. 2015; Eriksson 2016). Less attention has been devoted to the European countries where wolf populations have survived (e.g. Spain, Italy, Poland, Greece) and to the policy factors that contributed to the survival of the species.

Wolf management in densely-populated Europe with few large wilderness areas is inherently connected with a question of human-carnivore coexistence. The latter can be understood as “dynamic but sustainable state in which humans and large carnivores co-adapt to living in shared landscapes

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where human interactions with carnivores are governed by effective institutions that ensure long-term carnivore population persistence, social legitimacy, and tolerable levels of risk” (Carter and Linnell 2016: 575). However, so far, the processes through which such institutions are formed remain relatively under-researched. And yet, the awareness of the diversity of actors involved in human-carnivore coexistence, rules and goals of the system, as well as underpinning values, knowledges and worldviews of actors that shape this system is crucial for managing unavoidable conflicts and for making the system sustainable (Hartel et al. 2019; Lozano et al. 2019).

Poland offers an interesting case for analysing wolf policy-making. For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Poland hosted the westernmost population of the species in Central and Eastern Europe. After the Second World War, wolves increased their numbers and their range, but in the mid-1970s, following two decades of persecution, they almost went extinct. The authorities listed the species as a game animal and limited the hunting period. This proved enough to increase the population but not to recover the species across Poland. In 1991, a new legislation created the possibility to protect the wolf at a regional level, which gradually led to the full protection of the carnivore across the country in 1998 (Figura and Mysłajek 2019; Niedziałkowski and Putkowska-Smoter 2020). Consequently, Poland became one of the first countries in this part of Europe to protect wolves. In the former USSR countries, bordering with Poland in the east, wolves were either hunted without restrictions, as in Belarus, or treated as a game with a specified close season, as in the Baltic states (Jedrzejewski et al. 2010). In Slovakia, bordering Poland in the south, after a few attempts to protect the species in 1995-1999, it remained under the hunting regime (Find’o et al. 2008). In the 1990s legal protection of wolves was introduced in Slovenia (Adamic et al. 2004) and Romania (Geacu 2009).

Wildlife management in Poland has been traditionally dominated by hunters who have been managing game according to the hunting legislation (1927, 1952, 1995). Endangered species such as the bear, the European bison, and the beaver have been legally protected by the government based on the Nature Conservation Act (1934, 1948, 1991, 2004) and their lethal control was possible only in exceptional cases. With regard to the large carnivores in Poland, the bear has been protected since 1952 and the lynx since 1995. However, the discussion concerning the need to protect certain species had never been as heated as in the case of the wolf. We set out to analyse the discursive background of the policy change by focusing on story-lines present in the discourse on the wolf’s management and two discourse coalitions concentrated around them, which argued in favour of hunting or in favour of protection of the wolf.

Discourses are shared ways of understanding the world, which enable interpretation of information, production of coherent story-lines, definition of common sense and legitimate knowledge (Dryzek 2013). Environmental discourses condition definitions, interpretations and actions regarding the environment and, therefore, their understanding is of critical importance for making sense of the environmental politics

(Hajer 1995), although one can also analyse it focusing on the governance (legal systems, markets, bureaucracies) or particular policies. Discursive analysis of environmental problems is based on the assumption that struggles about concepts and meaning are a crucial part of environmental policy and that environmental discourse both influences and is affected by material practices and power relations. Epstein (2008), who studied the impact of anti-whaling discourse on international policy making, suggested that discourses about wildlife render animals meaningful to people in particular ways and bring them into a system of relationships with other objects; such discourses also constitute the identities of groups involved (e.g. hunters or environmental activists). These assumptions guided numerous studies of the impact of discourses regarding animals on wildlife policies (e.g. Neumann 2004; Snijders 2014; Niedziałkowski 2019), including policies concerning the wolf (Nie 2002; Lynn 2010; Figari and Skogen 2011; Vitali 2014).

Our research uses the concepts of story-lines and discourse-coalitions to analyse the evolution of the policy-making process concerning wolf protection in Poland, with an emphasis on moments that might have influenced the changes in the wolf conservation discourse. The main aim of this analysis is to identify story-lines which constituted the discourse-coalitions and to determine which of them contributed to institutionalising of certain narratives on the wolf in the Polish legal system. We also identify some of the argumentation schemes used in the story-lines. The paper documents a very dynamic character of discursive struggles between coalitions before a major change in conservation rules. Furthermore, it traces the increasing polarisation of positions, characteristic for “wicked” conservation conflicts. The paper contributes to the literature on discursive politics of large carnivore conservation (Figari and Skogen 2011; Serenari and Lute 2020) analysing discursive struggles behind the emergence of a new ‘hegemonic’ discourse and its institutional structures. The contribution of the paper consists also in joining analysis of story-lines with some tools of argumentation analysis (Reisigl 2014) to provide a more comprehensive picture of arguments used by discourse-coalitions. Although some of already mentioned works on wildlife conservation are based on Hajer’s approach (Snijders 2014; Niedziałkowski 2019), they did not investigate the story-line as an element distinguishing the discourse-coalitions. Our paper also contributes to the literature on human-carnivore coexistence by exploring the paradigms that underpin a successful and relatively low-conflict wolf governance institutions in human-dominated landscapes. By linking discourses and institutions it provides capacity to critically evaluate existing paradigms and rules that they entail and to seek solutions that bridge these paradigms enhancing coexistence.

In the next section of the paper, we describe our analytical approach and methods. This is followed by a description of the case study, including discursive coalitions and dominant story lines. After that we discuss the results with the literature on wildlife conservation and environmental discourses. The paper ends with brief conclusions.

## ANALYTICAL APPROACH AND METHODS

Following Feindt and Oels (2005), we perceive environmental problems as socially constructed, without authoritative interpretations of the issues discussed, but rather with multiple contested interpretations. Socially constructed problems should not be taken as objectively ‘given’, but rather their representation should be recognised as an effect of linguistic regularities. This implies that their constitution reflects strategies of power and knowledge, which is similarly situated in the case of nature as in the case of other knowledge claims. To investigate potential coalitions centred upon shared definitions and causal links, we refer to the concept of discourse coalitions (Hajer 1995: 62) – groups of actors attracted to a particular set of story lines, defined as “narratives on social reality through which elements from many different domains are combined and that provide actors with a set of symbolic references that suggest a common understanding”. The actors in such coalitions use story-lines within certain practises (e.g. policy making, forming of public opinion). Since we believe that in such policy-making process regarding a controversial issue argumentation might be an important element constituting the story-lines, we additionally employed the Discourse-Historical Approach, to identify topoi – hypothetical (i.e. not explicit in textual surface) conclusion rules that justify the transition from the arguments (grounds) to the claim that a particular actor tries to defend (Reisigl 2014: 75). The detailed list of argumentative schemes identified in our research material is included in the Appendix 1.

Our research is theoretically rooted in Discursive Institutionalism (DI), which assumes that “institutional dynamics originate from the emergence of new ideas, concepts and narratives in society that institutionalise in social practices and that affect social outcomes” (Arts and Buizer 2009: 340). DI takes into account not only ideas and texts, but also the institutional context “in which and through which ideas are communicated via discourse” (Schmidt 2010: 4). The ‘institutions’ in DI are defined as “simultaneously constraining structures and enabling constructs of meaning, which are internal to ‘sentient’ (thinking and speaking) agents whose ‘background ideational abilities’ explain how they create and maintain institutions at the same time that their ‘foreground discursive abilities’ enable them to communicate critically about those institutions, to change (or maintain) them” (Schmidt 2008: 322). Institutions in DI are at the same time treated as given as “the context within which agents think, speak, and act”, as well as contingent (the results of agents’ thoughts, words, and actions) (Schmidt 2008: 314).

The data for the reconstruction of the process of wolf governance was collected in two stages of systematic review of the wolf-related content: the first took place in January-May 2018 and the second, supplementary review was conducted between February and June 2019. While selecting texts, we excluded material that did not feature visible argumentation schemes or those that were published repetitively in different periodicals. The final corpus included 80 texts: press articles from leading Polish journals specialising in hunting, forest

management and nature conservation, e.g. *Łowiec Polski*, *Las Polski*, *Przyroda Polska*, *Aura*, *Dzikie Życie*, *Chrońmy Przyrodę Ojczystą*, *Przegląd Leśniczy*, *Echa Leśne* (52), scientific articles (4) and books (2), interviews (2), political speeches (7), parliamentary questions (2) and minister’s responses (2), laws (2) and regulations (7), including their justifications. The texts were published between 1989 (the end of the Polish People’s Republic) and 1998 (publishing of a regulation on the protection of the wolf in Poland). The corpus includes all key texts covering the discussion concerning wolf management in the analysed period from different groups taking part in the discussion. The research material was investigated for specific storylines and coded through qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti.

## RESULTS

### Discursive changes and the wolf policy-making process

Between the political transformation of 1989 and the listing wolf as a protected species in 1998 we identified three significant turns in the discourse concerning wolf management. Following this, we present our results referring to four periods: phase 1 (December 1989 – March 1992), phase 2 (April 1992 – December 1994), phase 3 (1995 – August 1997) and phase 4 (September 1997 – April 1998).

In 1989, when the political transformation in Poland began, wolves were legally considered ‘game’. This status was introduced in 1975 because of the dramatic decline of the species in the mid-1970s following the persecution of the species (Okarma 1992). Political changes of 1989 stimulated development of the environmental movement. New nature conservation organisations could use the new possibilities of civic action and gain visibility engaging in protests and demonstrations, participating in decision-making procedures, lobbying for legal changes and managing environmental projects (Gliński and Koziarek 2007). One of the issues taken up by the environmental movement was the protection of wolves, which was quickly reflected in the texts published in the specialist press. The new Nature Conservation Act of 1991 allowed provincial governors to introduce regional protection of species. The Poznań province was the first to use this opportunity for wolf protection in April 1992. The changes in discourse were visible on both sides of the discussion – the discourse-coalition of the protection proponents included gradually more opinions from environmental activists, who became more present in public discourse during this period. On the other hand, the coalition of hunting advocates started to insist on retaining the hunting status quo, to prevent other provinces from following Poznań’s example.

The social mobilisation in favour of wolf protection in the years 1992-1994 led to regulations similar to the Poznań ones in several other provinces until the end of 1994. In 1995, the Minister of Environment decided to list the wolf as a protected species in Poland excluding three provinces (Krosno, Suwałki and Przemyśl) that hosted most of the population. As a result of the NGO campaign, Suwałki and Przemyśl adopted protection

and the Krosno province became the only one where wolves could be hunted (Niedziałkowski and Putkowska-Smoter 2020). This event marks another discursive change – from this moment Krosno province became the major concern of the wolf protection discourse. After the introduction of 1995 protection measures, three standpoints developed in the discourse regarding wolf protection— 1) arguing for wolf protection across Poland (i.e. including the Krosno province), 2) defending the status quo (i.e. the Krosno province retains wolf hunting), 3) revising existing protection measures and bringing back wolf hunting in the whole country.

The last significant change in legislation before listing the wolf as protected species took place in late August, 1997. An amendment to the Hunting Law introduced compensations for damage to livestock caused by wolves in the regions where the wolf was not protected on a year-round basis (Niedziałkowski and Putkowska-Smoter 2020). In this period, the dispute over wolf protection mainly addressed the Krosno province - the only region in Poland where wolf hunting was allowed. The argumentation of the advocates of protection did not change considerably during these months, while their opponents focused on ineffectiveness of the compensation distribution system. Compensations were no longer considered a solution for the problem of wolf attacks and simultaneously the hunting advocates increasingly portrayed the farmers as potential frauds rather than the victims. This phase eventually led to introduction of the wolf into the list of protected animals, which took place in April, 1998.

### Coalitions in the policy-making process

Through studying the discourse of social actors regarding wolf management we identified six story-lines in our research material (Table 1). Based on these story-lines, the actors involved in discussions around wolf management could be divided into two discourse-coalitions: supporting wolf protection (representing story-lines A-C), and supporting wolf hunting (representing story-lines D-F).

#### *Story-line A: Poland is responsible for the future of wolves.*

The first story-line was represented by the proponents of protection and it evolved through the analyzed periods. While during the first period the claims considered mostly local protection (Brzeziński 1991: 14), after introducing the new nature conservation act it gradually changed into postulates of hunting ban on a national level: “The wolf should be included in the list of protected species and excluded from the list of wild game animals as soon as possible” (Bereszyński et al. 1994: 7). Consequently, following 1995 regulations, in the last two periods the actors concentrated around this story-line moved their emphasis to both local (considering the last three provinces where wolf hunting was still legal) and international level (when referring to the international nature conservation agreements):

“In a situation where they [wolves] can only be hunted in Krosno and Suwałki provinces, we expect a real invasion

of foreign exchange hunters. Perhaps they will manage to reach the limit and then the wolf will become rare” (Śmietana as quoted by Potocki 1995: 5).

“The fate of the wolf in Western Europe, where the wolves from our country are trying to get through, depends on our social awareness and our responsibility towards nature and future generations. So it’s time to take the next step and protect an endangered species not only in Europe, but also worldwide” (Bereszyński et al. 1996).

The actors representing this story-line usually relied on the topos of responsibility<sup>1</sup> in which the dissidents or society were positioned as the responsible subjects, and the topos of law<sup>2</sup>, where national and international regulations on nature conservation were used as the authority: “The wolf as a species is subject to the Washington Convention, to which Poland acceded in 1990, and the Bern Convention. Therefore, the protection of the wolf in Poland is not a private matter for Poles, especially since we are supposed to be entering Europe” (Bereszyński et al. 1996).

#### *Story-line B: Hunting pressure threatens the wolf population in Poland.*

The second story-line specific for the advocates of protection was focused on the hunting pressure on the wolf in past years. The actors referring to this story-line argued, that the quantity of wolves drastically decreased in communist Poland and the intensity of hunting pressure for this species is the reason for such a condition (e.g. Okarma 1993: 155–156). A common element for this story-line was also perceiving hunting activities as the main barrier for the species’ recovery and accusing hunters of trivialisation of the problem and overestimation of the wolf’s numbers:

“One question that raises doubts is the number of wolves in Poland, which has been overestimated by about 60% and ranges between 500-600 individuals, not 800, as the article shows. The practice of overestimating these values is common in our country and is associated with the deliberate recognition of migrating individuals as permanent fauna. In this way, the same wolves are counted several times in the neighboring forest districts” (Kala and Karwacka 1997).

Partial means of the wolf’s conservation, such as the periods of protection or – in later phases – hunting permission in the species’ largest habitats, were considered as ineffective in the process of the carnivore’s recovery – only full protection was considered a sufficient way to achieve this goal. Argumentation schemes specific for this story-line are based mostly on topoi of danger (or threat)<sup>3</sup>, topoi of abuse<sup>4</sup>, topoi of a terrible place<sup>5</sup> or topoi of disaster<sup>6</sup>:

“To sum up, it should be emphasised that the final moment has come to start protecting the wolf throughout Poland. Otherwise, this animal will join the species that have already disappeared from the face of the earth. We cannot let nature lose another representative” (Kuźniewicz 1995). “The hunted wolves are valuable trophies from the hunters’ point of view, worthy of public display at exhibitions (...).



**Table 1**  
**Story-lines identified in the wolf case**

Story-line	Sub story-lines	Comments
A: Poland is responsible for the future of wolves	The government has competences to introduce protection across the country Provinces need to use regional protection laws International nature conservation agreements require wolf protection	represented by proponents of protection based on topos of law and topos of responsibility, where the responsibility is put on the government or the society used through the whole period, but in different phases addressed different areas lacking wolf protection
B: Hunting pressure threatens the wolf population in Poland	The number of wolves decreased drastically in communist Poland Hunting disrupts the recovery of wolf populations Partial protection does not limit hunting enough Hunters overestimate wolf numbers	present throughout 1989-1998 represented by advocates of protection manifested through argumentation schemes based on topoi of danger, abuse, terrible place and disaster protection seen as the only way to ensure species' recovery
C: Environmental benefits outweigh minor problems with livestock depredation	The wolf is an efficient natural selector Wolves rarely attack livestock Research proves the positive role of the wolf in the ecosystems Ecosystems in western countries could benefit from wolf recovery in Poland	present throughout 1989-1998 in the first phase actors supporting wolf hunting also recognised the positive role of the wolf protection proponents relied on this story-line when arguing for protection of the wolf in phases 3 and 4
D: The wolf is not endangered in Poland and it can be hunted	The wolf population is stable Partial protection is enough International nature conservation laws do not conform with Polish conditions	represented by the advocates of wolf hunting mostly used to encourage the authorities to relax hunting restrictions based on topos of disproportionate means and topos of favourable time after partial protection in 1995 represented also by some former proponents of protection
E: Hunters can manage wolf populations sustainably	Hunters have the closest contact with the species The role of the wolf as a natural selector is overestimated Hunting limitations encourage poaching	specific for a discourse-coalition of hunters and hunting researchers, based on topos of danger/threat or fallacy ad consequentiam often supported with accounts of hunters' direct contact with wolves
F: The wolf is a dangerous predator and should be hunted	Wolves attack livestock Compensations are not sufficient and lead to financial abuses Hunting increases the distance between the wolf and livestock Environmentalists ignore interests of local farmers Fear of wolves justifies hunting	used mostly by hunters and game biologists to contradict story-line C. its use intensified in the later phases and concerned mostly the Krosno province. supported by the examples of wolf attacks based on the topos of uselessness/disadvantage and the topos of terrible place

It is estimated that the present century will go down in history as the age of robbery for the management of all natural resources on Earth" (Bereszyński et al. 1995).

*Story-line C: Environmental benefits outweigh minor problems with livestock depredation*

Story-line C, which emphasised the environmental benefits of the wolf's conservation, was also mostly present among the proponents of protection between 1989 and 1998. The use of this story-line increased in phases 3 and 4, when the main goal was to convince the authorities that the presence of the carnivore outweighs minor damage done by the species to the livestock. A topos of advantage/usefulness<sup>7</sup>, where the wolf was positioned as an efficient natural selector, was a key argumentation scheme for this story-line (often supported by topos of authority of scientists or other professionals dealing with wolves):

"These unique in nature, rare and endangered predators, settle spontaneously in the regions

optimal for them, such as areas with a high number of deer, often degraded due to excessive density and causing damage to forests. The role of the wolf in forest management is more and more appreciated by foresters" (Bereszyński 1997).

In the first period (1989-1992) the story-line also manifested itself in some of the texts written by hunting advocates, who also recognised the positive role of the wolf in ecosystems:

"In optimal biotopes the wolf is a desirable species. In such areas a cautious reduction should be carried out considering natural increase of populations, reliable inventory and the planned number of animals to be killed. Such a strategy will not disrupt wolf numbers and, at the same time, it will prevent both wolf population from growing excessively and the excessive wolves from being pushed to suboptimal biotopes" (Gwiazdowicz and Klejnotowski 1992: 7).

*Story-line D: The wolf is not endangered in Poland and it can be hunted.*

The story-line, questioning the wolf's status as an endangered species, was crucial for the opponents of protection through the whole researched period. The main way of argumentation within this story-line was based on topos of favorable time<sup>8</sup>, through which hunting advocates argued for relaxing existing hunting restrictions, referring to the belief about the stability of the wolf's population in Poland:

"Another inventory carried out in the 1990s shows that the population of wolves in our country has slightly decreased and is well stabilized at the level of about 850 (...), and the excess of undetected individuals began migrating. (...) In the light of the above information, the motives for including the wolf in the "Polish Red Book of Animals", (...) are incomprehensible" (Bobek et al. 1994).

With increasing legal actions towards the protection of the species, a topos of disproportionate means<sup>9</sup> was applied more often, with references to the new legislation viewed as too restrictive or the international conservation agreements as unsuitable to Polish conditions:

"For example, prof. Z. Głowaciński uses the provisions of international conventions on the protection of the wolf", which do not match the Polish reality (...), as a scare tactic. On the other hand, W. Śmietana proposes the creation of buffer zones around the borders of the National Parks, where wolf hunting would be prohibited (...). In practice, creating such a buffer zone (...) would mean that almost half of the Bieszczady Mountains would be protected and the wolf is certainly not a rare species there" (Bobek et al. 1995).

The 1995 regulation contributed to a significant turn among some previous proponents of protection, including Zbigniew Głowaciński:

"I am careful not to develop such an extreme situation, because every extreme immediately causes a counter-offensive and extreme reactions arise. (...) I don't know if there really is a reason to change something here. If we grant hunting permits in these three provinces, we only need to monitor whether there are any glaring errors in issuing decisions..." (Transcript of State Nature Protection Council's meeting, 1996).

*Story-line E: Hunters can manage wolf population.*

Story-line E was specific for actors who identified themselves as hunters or game researchers. A common feature for this story-line was a belief, that hunters should regulate the population of the wolf, since they have the closest contact with the species. Such view was sometimes supported by accounts of direct encounters with wolves: "In the vast areas of the former pre-partition Poland, rich in impenetrable forest, where there have been wolves, there have not been deer. When hunting there from 1913 to 1938, I never saw deer or their tracks" (Terlecki 1995). Legal limitations were seen as a threat<sup>10</sup> to a proper species' population management, because of potential risk of poaching practices: "We also do not exclude the second option, in which wolves, due to their nuisance, will be exterminated by

the local population using all available means" (Bobek et al. 1995). This story-line was also accompanied by a view, that the role of the wolf as a natural selector was overestimated<sup>11</sup> and thus human intervention in regulating the eco-system should not be excluded:

"The stereotype of the wolf as an effective selector has also been questioned in the light of the latest research. The work of H. Okarma and W. Śmietana, the results of which the authors do not cite in the articles discussed, because they "do not fit" the current doctrine on the role of the wolf in the selection of potential victims" (Bobek et al. 1995).

*Story-line F: The wolf is a dangerous predator and should be hunted.*

The last identified story-line was particularly visible in the last two periods, when the discussion was focused on the provinces where wolves had attacked livestock animals. This story-line was used by hunters and game biologists as an answer to story-line C present among the protection proponents. The latter were represented as unconcerned about the interests of livestock owners: "In the Bieszczady Mountains, the wolf is hated because it attacks sheep and calves. It is loved in big cities, because there have never been wolves there, and never will be. The Association for Nature "Wolf" was founded in such an environment" (Szostak 1997). Hunters, on the other hand, were positioned as necessary to keep the distance between the wolf and the human: "There is a consensus that low losses among domestic animals are the result of a several-fold increase in the number of large game in recent years, as well as the pressure of hunters, effectively increasing the distance between wolves and humans" (Bobek et al. 1994). Another characteristics of this story-line was the negative perception of compensations for livestock damage, which according to some actors created opportunities for financial abuse:

"Compensation for livestock animals will increase, both because of the actual increase in the number of animals killed by wolves and because of the bogus damages reported by dishonest farmers. The latter will start to appear *en masse* in "conflict" provinces, where the wolf is under year-round protection, and the compensation is paid from the state budget, i.e. from the taxpayer's pocket" (Bobek, as quoted by Kamiński 1997).

A frequently used argumentation scheme in this story-line relied on topos of disadvantage, in reference to losses the farmers experienced due to wolf attacks:

"last year in the province of Krosno, wolves killed 438 sheep. This year, by June, approximately 200 sheep have been killed. In this situation, various possible remedial measures were applied, increased surveillance, the administrations of the State Forests and hunting clubs joined in. Unfortunately, it did not bring the desired results" (Bugaj 1997: 28).

Also, argumentation based on topos of terrible place was used as a part of this story-line, with references to Krosno province. The fear experienced by livestock owners served as a justification for hunting. The terrible place topos was often

grounded on accounts of wolves attacking livestock animals: “The Bieszczady Mountains are a particularly important place. Last year, it was there that wolves attacked more than twenty sheep. Three years ago, a wolf badly injured an inhabitant of the vicinity of Lutowska. So the farmers from Bieszczady are furious” (Szostak 1997).

### Assessment of discursive patterns

In the first analysed period, the actors began presenting ideas about the wolf management in post-transformation Poland. The discussion was on an abstract level since no actions were taken to protect the species legally. The discourse mostly included professionals (scientists and foresters) and took the form of policy disagreements – “disputes that can be resolved by examining the facts and evidence of the situation” (Schön and Rein 1994, as quoted by Nie 2003: 320). The hunters hardly participated in the discussion as nothing seemed to threaten the *status quo*. After introducing local protection in the Poznań province, the dispute turned from policy disagreement to policy controversy, following Schön and Rein’s terminology, in which parties “differ in what they consider to be facts relevant to the dispute, and when they do agree on the relevant facts, they often interpret them differently” (ibid). This concerned three opposition lines distinguished by Van Herzele and Aarts (2019): 1) the actors disputed if and where the wolf population should be protected and recovered; 2) wolf protection supporters underlined its positive role in ecosystems, while hunting advocates emphasised damage to livestock and wolf-related threats; 3) hunters considered hunting as a method of nature conservation, while activists and some wildlife biologists introduced the rhetoric of deep ecology in the wolf protection discourse and perceived shooting wolves as an obsolete and cruel sport.

The controversy continued in the next phase of the dispute focused on the interpretation of the regulation introducing the protection of wolves in all but three provinces. Three competing interpretations of this regulation were present: 1) it should be a step towards complete protection; 2) it is a step too far and the wolf should again be a game animal; 3) the regulation sufficiently protects the species. The interpretations in favour of the regulation became dominant, pushing the critics to focus on the provinces where wolf protection was still disputed. After introducing protection in two more provinces, the supporters of hunting focused on sustaining hunting in the Krosno province. Their position contained elements of all three critical approaches to environmental conservation distinguished by Buijs et al. (2014): 1) a local ownership discourse (environmentalists do not understand the interests of local communities); 2) a discourse of development constraints (the wolf disturbs development of important sectors of local economy – tourism and livestock farming); 3) a populist discourse (portraying nature conservation as an upper-class hobby, emphasising the urban origin of environmentalists and their lack of understanding of local communities in the Krosno province). Most of the argumentation in this position

was based on *argumentum ad hominem* and *argumentum ad consequentiam*. Proponents of wolf protection highlighted the need to compensate for damage caused by the predators and supported lethal control of livestock-attacking wolves. This position can be interpreted as an attempt to construct a win-win discourse (Svarstad et al. 2008) aimed at biodiversity conservation and considering interests of local people.

We observed that while at the beginning some story-lines were shared, over time the discussion led to polarisation of discourses. This supports the argument of Van Herzele et al. (2015) that the debate itself and its focus on a set of binary oppositions can contribute to the polarising dynamics. In our view, this effect was caused to a large extent by the increasing awareness of the groups involved in the differences in values and beliefs as well as of the political, procedural and distributional consequences of the institutionalised discourses (Kaufmann et al. 2018). These processes contributed to the formation of discourse coalitions and identities, and to the final resolution of the debate around wolf management based on the discursive power of these coalitions (Robbins 2006).

Our analysis shows that certain story-lines and argumentation were gradually taken over by the authorities and became institutionalised. The 1998 regulation considering the status of the wolf in Poland reflects story-lines A and C and includes argumentation schemes typical for these narratives (topos of usefulness/advantage and topos of responsibility). As Discursive Institutionalism suggests, “ideas and values infuse the exercise of power and (subjective) perceptions of position” (Schmidt 2010: 18). Although wildlife biologists and environmental NGOs in Poland had limited political or economic influence in comparison with other groups in the field, such as foresters or hunters (Rancew-Sikora 2009; Figura and Mysłajek 2019; Niedziałkowski 2019), they were able to mobilise informal forms of power including expertise and knowledge, which translated to trust, social and informational capital, and which play an important role in large carnivore policy-making (Sandström et al. 2009). A scientific discourse reconceptualising the wolf and its role in the environment, developed by wildlife biologists and promoted by activists, achieved a hegemonic position, influenced the dominant definition of reality, and transformed power relations and rules in the field.

Unlike in Norway, France (Skogen et al. 2006) or Sweden (Sjölander-Lindqvist 2008), where scientific arguments were mobilised solely to support wolf conservation, in our case scientific claims were also made to oppose it. Thus, the question was not so much about the informal power of scientific expertise vs. other types of knowledge but more about which types of scientific expertise and evidence would be considered more valid. Scientific knowledge about wolves is open to social interpretation (Stöhr and Coimbra 2013) and the argumentative schemes we identified influenced this interpretation.

The debate in Poland was finally resolved through a combative, rather than consensual interaction. Consequently, although politically the discourse coalition of supporters of wolf protection prevailed, the members of the competing coalition were not



persuaded, which might have impacted the implementation of the new policy and its stability in the long run (Gula 2008; Carter and Linnell 2016). For example, some game researchers, shortly after protection was introduced, tried to bypass the hunting ban by applying for permission to shoot wolves for scientific purposes. Also, wolves were hunted illegally (Nowak and Mysłajek 2016). However, further measures introduced to reduce the human-wildlife conflict and promote coexistence within the dominant paradigm (particularly implementation of the compensation scheme, support for the introduction of herd protection measures, relatively quick responses to problem-causing wolves) facilitated stability of the new institutional arrangement and relatively peaceful human-carnivore coexistence despite growing range and population numbers. However, further research is needed to analyse how existing hegemonic structures and discourses are challenged by groups that feel affected by the new institutional regime and how their interests and framings can be considered (Serenari and Lute 2020).

## CONCLUSIONS

The debate over wolf protection in Poland between 1989 and 1998 involved a conflict of interpretations about what the protection of the species should mean, who should lead it, and to what extent it should be regulated. This debate escalated and transformed from policy disagreement to policy controversy. Although the identified interpretations to some extent overlapped with positions of professional and social groups involved in the conflict, particular story-lines and their prevalence in some groups suggest the functioning of wider discourse coalitions, which advocated either the protection of wolves or wolf hunting. The environmental coalition attempted to challenge the dominant vision of the wolf and existing institutions by using a new counter-discourse and a broad set of argumentation schemes. The coalitions supporting wolf hunting lacked discursive power to provide effective response. The new discourse and the social mobilisation it stimulated contributed to a radical bottom-up institutional change. Since the 1998 Minister's regulation came into force, wolf protection has officially prohibited wolf hunting.

The paper highlights the role of analysing discourses to understand conservation policy-making and points to a dynamic nature of storylines represented during a crucial period before the policy change. It contributes to the literature on discursive politics of carnivore management identifying discursive mechanisms leading to new hegemonic power-knowledge structures, polarisation of social actors and to the formation of discourse coalitions common for conservation conflicts. We suggest that such an approach to discourse analysis in conservation conflicts might improve understanding of existing tensions in wildlife management and facilitate searching for common ground when discussing potential solutions for coexistence with large carnivores in human-dominated landscapes. At the same time, focusing on discourses, we did not investigate resources of social actors and political situation that made it possible for certain conservation storylines to be reflected in legislation.

## Author Contributions Statement

- KN, AK conceived and designed the study
- KN, AK, RPS collected the data
- AK analysed the data
- AK drafted the manuscript
- KN and RPS critically revised the manuscript
- KN approved the final version to be published

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## Declaration of competing/conflicting interests

The authors declare no competing interests in the conduct of this research.

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## Research Ethics Approval

The authors confirm that the research did not require formal approval regarding data collection and processing. It also did not include any experimental protocols to be approved by institutional and/or licensing committee/s. The authors confirm that all methods were carried out in accordance with The Code of Ethics of the Polish Sociological Association and The Code of Ethics for Research Workers of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

## Data Availability

All relevant data are within the paper.

## Preprint Archiving

Not applicable.

## NOTES

1. Such an argumentation scheme is based on the following conditional: "because a state or a group of persons is responsible for the emergence of specific problems, it or they should act in order to find solutions of these problems" (Reisigl and Wodak 2001: 78).
2. Topos of law is a form of an authority topoi (Kienpointner 1992: 393–402) and could be paraphrased by following conditional: "if a law or an otherwise codified norm prescribes or forbids a specific politico-administrative action, the action has to be performed or omitted" (Reisigl and Wodak 2001: 79).

3. It relies on a conditional: 'if there are specific dangers and threats, one should do something against them' (Reisigl and Wodak 2001). It is also important to consider the object under threat or danger (X), which is determined by the content of arguments. In our study the X could mean the wolf, the livestock or other game animals.
4. The *topos of abuse* follows a conditional: 'if a right is abused, then the right should be changed' (Reisigl and Wodak 2001), which concerns abusing hunting laws. The *terrible place topos* is usually related to a specific region or Poland in general as a place hostile to wolves.
5. *Locus terribilis* argumentation scheme that associates certain negative social/political continuities with a certain place (Wodak et al. 2009: 97–98).
6. A topos through which a party argues against a certain action due to drastically negative consequences it has brought (Wodak et al. 2009: 40).
7. As paraphrased in a conditional: 'if an action under a specific relevant point of view will be useful, then one should perform it' (Reisigl and Wodak 2001).
8. This topos follows a conditional: if some good thing is about to arise and develop, one should immediately make an effort to do it before the favorable conditions expire (Wodak et al. 2009).
9. An argumentation scheme, in which a high effort required for the action is inadequate to the action's success and could be the most negative consequence of this action; '*shooting sparrows with cannons topos*' (Kindt 1992).
10. It could be considered a *topos of danger* when the justification is based on actual statistics concerning wolf attacks on livestock, or *argumentum ad consequentiam fallacy*, when the argument content relies on speculations of possible negative consequences, without the rightness of the claim itself being disputed (Van Eemeren et al. 2013, 69).
11. Reisigl and Wodak defined this as a "topos of uselessness/disadvantage", which is an opposite of the usefulness/advantage topos (Reisigl and Wodak 2001).

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