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Who let the Wolves Out?

- Perceptions about the presence of the Wolf in Central
Greece

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Credits: 30 HEC

Level: Second cycle (A2E)

Course title: Independent Project in Environmental Sciences - Master's thesis

Course code: EX0431

Programme/Education: Environmental Communication and Management – Master's Programme

Place of publication: Uppsala

Year of publication: 2014

Online publication: <http://stud.epsilon.slu.se>

Keywords: wildlife management, wolf, conflict, social representations, Greece

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor Hans Peter Hansen and his Phd student and assistant supervisor Erica von Essen for the excellent collaboration we had from the first moment we discussed, their support, positive energy and trust. Additionally I am thankful to the project “Confronting challenges to political legitimacy of the natural resource management regulatory regime in Sweden - the case of illegal hunting” for co-funding this research.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my family and friends for supporting me, each of them on their own way, these two years of my studies in Uppsala.

Abstract

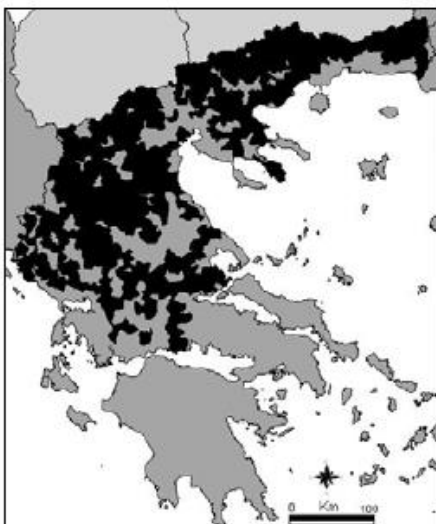
The protection of the former outlaw wolf (*Canis lupus*) has become a conflicting issue in regions of Central and Northern Greece the last years. The population of the wolf in rural areas has been a trouble for livestock breeders in those areas due to the attacks on their herds. Therefore they are important actors in the conflict related to the protection of the wolf. The reasons they emerge and the ways those conflicts should be resolved spot the light on the socio-political aspect of the situation. The case of the presence of the wolf in two regions in Central Greece and its perceptions from people related to animal husbandry is the topic of this study. Employing the structural approach of the theoretical framework of the Social Representations, it was concluded that negative characteristics of the wolf rooted in the local history and culture are connected with the included in the study practices and attitudes breeders and veterinarians have towards wolves in the region. Narratives about secret releases of wolf are dominant and they reveal issues mainly related to distrust towards NGO's and public services and the feeling of marginalization is strong, while acts of illegal hunting appear to be consequent practice which can be interpreted as a political action.

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1. Introduction

The sociological aspect of wildlife conservation which has been revealed in many studies concerning the wolf conservation both in Europe and in USA (Bisi et al., 2007; Chavez et al., 2005; Ericsson and Heberlein, 2003; Figari and Skogen, 2011; Krange and Skogen, 2011; Skogen et al., 2008) needs to be considered as an important factor of wildlife management. As Stoll-Kleemann (2001) put it *"the conservation related conflicts may not derive from differing economic or technical land-use objectives, but rather on more complex factors including social aspects such as psychological reactance and social-identity"* (in Marshall et al., 2007, p. 3130). When a management plan is going to be discussed in order for it to be successful it is crucial to be considered the extent to which such management will create any change to people's lives but also any possible intervene to their culture, identity and relationship with the environment (Ender-Wada et al.1998; Maschia et al. 2003; Clayton and Brook 2005 in Marshall et al., 2007:3131)

Wolf population covers the majority of continental Greece and has led to a need for livestock protection methods which until now are traditional methods like use of sheepdogs and enclosures and a continuous presence of the stockbreeder (Iliopoulos et al., 2009, p. 11). In Northern and Central Greece wolf population seems to be stable during the last ten years, although in certain regions, a decline in numbers has been reported. The last 25 years wolf population has expanded to areas in Central Greece (Sterea Hellas) where wolf presence used to be occasional (Salvatory and Linnell, 2005). According to the Report from the European Council¹ on the conservation status and threats for the wolf (*Canis lupus*) in Europe the main threats for the wolf in Greece are shortage of food resources, uncontrolled hunting and significant lack of appropriate game and hunting management, illegal use of poison baits which is taking place uncontrollably and is an extremely widespread act (Salvatory and Linnell, 2005, p. 13). The illustration below show the distribution of the wolf in Greece as it was shown in the Report for the EC (Salvatory and Linnell, 2005, p. 13).



The distribution range of wolf in Greece.

Moreover, it has to be pointed out that there is no national policy or specific action plan for the protection of the wolf in the country and this has as a result to devitalize any national legislation (*ibid*). In light of new conservation measures, research has increasingly depicted both positive attitudes but also the hostile

¹[http://www.researchgate.net/publication/228641574_Report_on_the_conservation_status_and_threats_for_wolf_\(Canis_lupus\)_in_Europe/file/60b7d51a339d841cda.pdf](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/228641574_Report_on_the_conservation_status_and_threats_for_wolf_(Canis_lupus)_in_Europe/file/60b7d51a339d841cda.pdf).

behavior of humans towards the wolves (Salvatory and Linnell, 2005) and consequently similar attitudes towards the supporters of the protection of the wolf.

Wolves cause considerable damage to livestock in Greece by attacking all year round with the peak of number of attacks in summer and early autumn (Iliopoulos et al., 2009). According to the National Farmers' Insurance Authority (ELGA) in 1998, more than 1000 cases of damages caused by wolves and/or dogs were compensated, while between years 1996-1998 areas with no presence of wolves have seven times less damage compared to areas with regular presence. The coexistence of humans and wolves in some areas is not very easy task to be achieved. Locals usually state that wolves and bears are not part of the area or contend that their population was much smaller in the past and that on the basis of this they should not be there today. Locals' arguments depict their belief that carnivores' presence is *unnatural* in a way. The high number of attacks in livestock has contributed to the emergence of a conflict related to the presence of the wolf in the surrounding areas where breeders keep their sheep and goat flocks.

The Greek situation is not unique. Wolf is a carnivore that is usually related/ connected with conflicts (Mech and Boitani, 2003). Among others, cases in Romania, Croatia, Italy, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Italy and Greece are being studied in the literature. Conflicts are being analyzed (Krange and Skogen, 2011)(Bisi et al., 2007)(Buijs et al., 2011), attitudes of groups of people towards carnivores are investigated, and perceptions of locals about *carnivores, nature, and wildlife* (Hovardas and Korfiatis, 2012; R. Bruce Hull, David P. Robertson, 2001) are some of the examples of previous studies related to this topic. The deployment of naturalness as an argument for or against conservation measures is also analyzed as an important aspect in conservation (Rolston, 1997; Siipi, 2011, 2004). Research has also sought to explore the historical basis of conservation problems in an attempt to trace the roots of some of the more extreme attitudes and behaviors towards wolves (Bisi et al., 2010).

Wildlife management in general and wolf conservation in particular is not just a conservation problem; in literature there is an increased awareness that wildlife management is an sociopolitical issue (Messmer, 2000) that emerges between human groups with different perspectives on wildlife management (Marshall et al., 2007). The political aspect can be traced in cases where the conflicts emerge due to legislation, policies or regulations that have as result damages to individuals (Messmer,2000) without them being able to defend their property as they have used do before. This has contributed to the way communities perceive wildlife management and as a conclusion we have a continuous reshape of the social, cultural and political forces which contemporary wildlife managers have to work with (Messmer,2000).

Consequently, to go back to the case of the wolf in Central Greece, it is the breeders and livestock farmers that are very much related to the wolf conflict and their opposition to the current situation is expressed towards the NGO Callisto. Breeders are affected from the presence of wolves in the surrounding areas and are suffering considerable damages (Iliopoulos et al., 2009) which possibly affect them in the way they perceive the animal. Despite the lack of a national action plan for the protection of the wolf in Greece, it has to be pointed that the wolf is unlisted from the Greek Game List since 1991 and it is considered a fully protected species only south 39° parallel according to the E.C. Directive 92/43 (Salvatory and Linnell, 2005, p. 13).

I think it is of great importance to trace the views on the presence of the wolf in the surrounding areas shared by the locals. In the summer of 2013 I spent a month as an intern in the Non Governmental Organization

(NGO) Callisto². Callisto is working on the protection of wildlife and nature with most actions taking part in Central and Northern Greece. My avocation with that and the discussions with the employees at the NGO gave me the opportunity to get a broad view of their perceptions on the issues related to the wildlife protection in the central and northern parts of Greece. The bear and the wolf were most of the times related to conflicts between the NGO and the local population of various areas. People from Callisto narrated stories from the meetings they hold with locals in the conflicting areas as attempted to create a better understanding between them, which according to them are not always successful. A question posed from villagers that Callisto was called to answer, was “*Why do you release wolves and/or bears in our mountains*”. This question was the driving force of this paper, which is focused on the wolf’s presence case in rural areas of Central Greece.

Even though that the initial aim of this study was to explore how locals perceive the presence of the wolf, the visit to two districts in Central Greece revealed that the group of people related to animal husbandry in those areas is a more focused research group due to their willingness to discuss and their direct relation to the conflicting situation. It is an attempt to go beyond the ecological issues of the wolf management in Greece and spot the light on the sociopolitical and cultural factors of the conflict that may provide a very good understanding of the way those views are connected to the perpetuation of the dispute over the wolf and finally contribute to deal with it in a more constructive way.

Sociological and psychological approaches have been acknowledged by conservation biologists as ways to achieve an understanding of these issues (Marshall et al., 2007, p. 3130). In this study it is important to employ an approach that will give importance to the cultural, historical and sociopolitical aspects of the perceptions on the presence of wolf and focus on examining locally constructed ideas about the animal (Figari and Skogen, 2011, p. 318). Especially for the conflicts related to wolf it has been discussed that urban and rural dichotomies, socio-cultural tensions related to class and scientific knowledge perceived as a hegemonic power are factors that found to be influential in the perceptions over the wolf. Social representations framework will be used to guide the findings of the research since it provides a social psychological mean to understand collective conception of an issue (Willig and Stainton-Rogers, 2007, p. 196).

Aiming at developing a better understanding of the social conflicts related to wolves, this study will investigate how the presence of wolf is perceived from the group of locals who are closely related to animal farming in the areas where wolf is present: breeders and veterinarians. Furthermore the study will analyze how those perceptions of wolves in rural Greece are connected to the perpetuation of the human-wolf conflict. The analysis will be facilitated from the components of the social representation, the core and peripheral elements as introduced by Abric (1993).

2. Theory

This chapter introduces and discusses social representations theory in relation to the aims of this particular study. Social representations are a theoretical framework which stems from social psychology and is the theory which will shape the findings and guide the analysis. First, short analysis on the epistemology of social construction and its application to research related to the broader notion of nature, will be presented.

² <http://www.callisto.gr>

Next, the connection between social construction of nature and social representations is depicted. The chapter concludes with presenting the framework of social representations and its application in this research.

2.1. Social construction of nature

According to Alexander Wilson the division of nature and human beings is false: “we should by no means exempt science from social discussions of nature (...) in fact, the whole idea of nature as something separate from human existence is a lie. Humans and nature construct one another” (in Rolston, 1997, p. 39). One way of understanding the dialectic construction of nature is through peoples’ narratives about nature and through their communication about it.

In the case of this study it is the narratives and communication in relation to the presence of wolves that will be explored, not in the sense that everything is being constructed in our minds and language, but in a sense closer to what Paul Robbins calls “*soft*” constructivism (2004). This edge of the constructivist approach “*holds that our concepts of reality are real and have force in the world, but that they reflect incomplete, incorrect, biased and false understandings of an empirical reality*”(Robbins, 2012, p. 114). As (Jovchelovitch, 2001) discusses active symbolic construction, is bridging what stands out there as real world and any potential knowledge we can get from it. Despite the fact that social construction seems to be a very influential perspective in social science it has been subject to criticism, particularly radical or ‘*hard*’ constructivism (see Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009). Taking a less extreme point of departure, the importance here is given to how social construction explores the ways that social phenomena are created and institutionalized by humans, and how this knowledge is passed within the society through the years.

A social construction approach “*puts less emphasis on the intentional and strategic use of ideas and narratives about nature, and is more focused on how “naturalization” occurs, highlighting the social process whereby the contractedness of environmental concepts and practices is forgotten [(Robbins, 1998b) in (Robbins, 2012, p. 117)].* What Berger and Luckman call in other words “*paramount reality*” (in Inglis 2012:96), meaning the feeling of naturalness people give in the way reality is structured by the society.

This construction of wilderness, landscape and nature is crucial when it comes to understanding peoples’ perceptions of these notions (Benavides, 2013; Scarce, 1998). In a soft constructivist framework such notions are construed as socially constituted objects and not natural objects. When it comes to decision making, contested understandings have precipitated problematic situations. Scarce (1998) for example, explored the various meanings of the wolves given from residents in an area in Yellowstone as an attempt to eliminate the gap between stakeholders which contributed to the perpetuation of the conflict related to the wolves in the area.

2.2. Social Representations

Social psychology provides approaches commonly used in research in the domain of environmental science, as an attempt to get a more consistent understanding of, broadly called, environmental related experiences (Castro, 2006, p. 247; Stoll-Kleemann, 2001). Social psychology provides the means to explore attitudes, beliefs, representations, intentions, values, norms, worldviews, rationalities and discourses and their connection to behavior (*ibid*).

Social representations theory represents one such Social psychological approach that has been used exploring the relation or the understanding of people with the natural environment and related notions (see

Castro 2006; Buijs et al. 2012; Hovardas and Stamou 2006b; Hovardas and Stamou 2006a). Also explicitly in relation to the wolf issue, social representations theory has been used in study in Norway (Figari and Skogen, 2011) as an attempt to get a deeper understanding of reasons that perpetuate the conflicting situation over wolves.

Social representations theory is a social psychological framework that “*maintains that social psychological phenomena and processes can only be properly understood if they are seen as being embedded in historical, cultural and macrosocial conditions*” (Wagner et al., 1999, p. 95). Serge Moscovici who is the pioneer within social representations theory defines it as

“(…) *system(s) of values, ideas and practices with a twofold function; first, to establish an order which will enable individuals to orient themselves in their material and social world and to master it; and secondly to enable communication by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history*”

[(Moscovici,1973,p. xiii) in (Duveen and Lloyd, 1990, p. 1)]

In other words, social representations provide individuals and groups with, means in order to understand and handle something in relation to them and in a second level to name and communicate it. Alternatively, “*Social representation is defined as the elaborating of a social object by the community for the purpose of behaving and communicating*” (Moscovici 1963:251). With social object is meant any material or symbolic entity, which has certain characteristics ascribed from people, in order to talk about it (Wagner, 1998). In this study the presence of wolves constitutes the *social object* while breeders and veterinarians represent the *community*. What social representation researchers do is to “*observe talk and action which is related to a social phenomenon or object*” (Wagner et al., 1999, p. 96) and by that they can trace the specific social characteristics that have been attributed to this object from the group members (Wagner et al., 1999). This illustrates the importance this framework ascribes to the spoken language as means of understanding and communicating knowledge (Moscovici and Duveen, 2000, p. 31). Accordingly, in this research, narratives on wolf presence through semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and informal discussions between people related to animal husbandry in Central Greece as well as observations from these talks will be analyzed to outline the characteristics ascribed to the presence of wolves in the surrounding area.

Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies have been utilized in previous research to deal with social representations theory while there are also various schools of theoretical approaches (Wachelke, 2011; Willig and Stainton-Rogers, 2007). In this study the structural approach was chosen and it was carried out with the help of qualitative methodology. This approach emphasizes in the interconnection within the units that comprise a social representation. More specifically, in this application, simple ideas or basic cognitive units of meaning form the structure and they are called elements or cognemes (*ibid*). Therefore, “(…) *a social representation is a set of cognemes that refer to a social object and form an integrated knowledge structure shared by a group (…)*” (Wachelke, 2011, p. 730).

Abric (1993) makes a conceptual distinction between two kinds of elements that comprise social representations: the central core and the peripheral elements. The central core elements are characterized by their stability. They depict the most important aspects that group have ascribed to the social object. The peripheral elements have a complementary character to the central core and they permit the integration of

individual experiences and past histories. Contrary to the central core, they are more flexible (Buijs et al., 2012; Figari and Skogen, 2011; Wachelke, 2011).

Social representations framework is chosen because of its emphasis on the historical cultural aspect and the importance of spoken language. Narratives, sayings, talking within groups used from the locals are going to be examined which actually are verbal communication and usually find their roots in local cultural history. It is, therefore, important to have a theoretical approach which attributes the importance to historical roots and the cultural dimension as well as centering on the interactions within a group in verbal communication.

More specifically, in this paper, the core and peripheral elements of the social representations of the wolf shared by breeders and veterinarians will be explored. The central core elements will give us an understanding of the stable and collective representations of the wolf while the peripherals will provide further knowledge on how the individuals of the group support the central core elements. The central core and peripheral elements are the two components of the social representations which are “*dependent insofar as the peripheral elements connect the non-negotiable ideas of central core to the immediate situation in a dynamic response*” (Figari and Skogen, 2011, p. 318). The importance of this approach in the particular topic is that we will be able to trace how believes, attitudes, values and practices (Abric, J. C, 1993) related to the wolf that are collective, strong and rigid are supported from individuals within the social group, by analyzing the peripheral elements.

The adaptation of new situations carried out by the peripheral elements will help shed light on issues connected to the conflict related to the presence of the wolf. This assumption is based on among others, the relatively recent changes on the Greek law and regulations related to the wolf and the NGO’s establishment, which brings on new knowledge, situations and stimuli that a social group has to understand and communicate. The peripheral elements are responsible to integrate experience in accordance to the collective memory and history of the group and therefore attitudes and practices towards the wolf can be an example of this integration “*connecting core ideas about nature of the animals to other aspects of the social and physical environments in which large carnivore conflicts take place*”(Figari and Skogen, 2011).

3. Method

This chapter presents the methods applied to investigate how wolves are perceived from breeders and veterinarians in areas with presence of wolf in surrounding areas. In this research a phenomenological approach was chosen to get an understanding of how wolves are perceived from individuals and groups of people. First the collection of empirical material will be presented and then some general information about the regions that were visited will be displayed. The discussion of techniques and method of data collection follow. Additionally a table is provided which depicts all techniques which were utilized during the field trip. As it was mentioned in the introduction the initial aim was to talk to local in a broader sense, so in the table all the encounters will be presented even though that eventually only narratives and information from breeders and veterinarians were analyzed. The chapter concludes with limitations and barriers of the methods and techniques of data collection.

3.1. Empirical Material

Qualitative research is a common way to research social representations, even though that initially quantitative research was employed. In this research different qualitative methods were utilized as the

plurality of methods has proved to be more fruitful (Flick and Foster in Willig and Stainton-Rogers, 2007:201) in order to understand people's perceptions.

Semi-structured and focus group interviews were conducted as part of a multi-method phenomenological approach to get the best understanding of the respondents' worldviews. In addition participant observation was used throughout the whole field work along combined with more informal interviewing. The rationale for combining these qualitative methods was premised on the methodological point that a mix of meta-theoretically congruent methods provides in depth access to the phenomenon studied in the field (Willig and Stainton-Rogers, 2007; Salmon & Buetow, 2013).

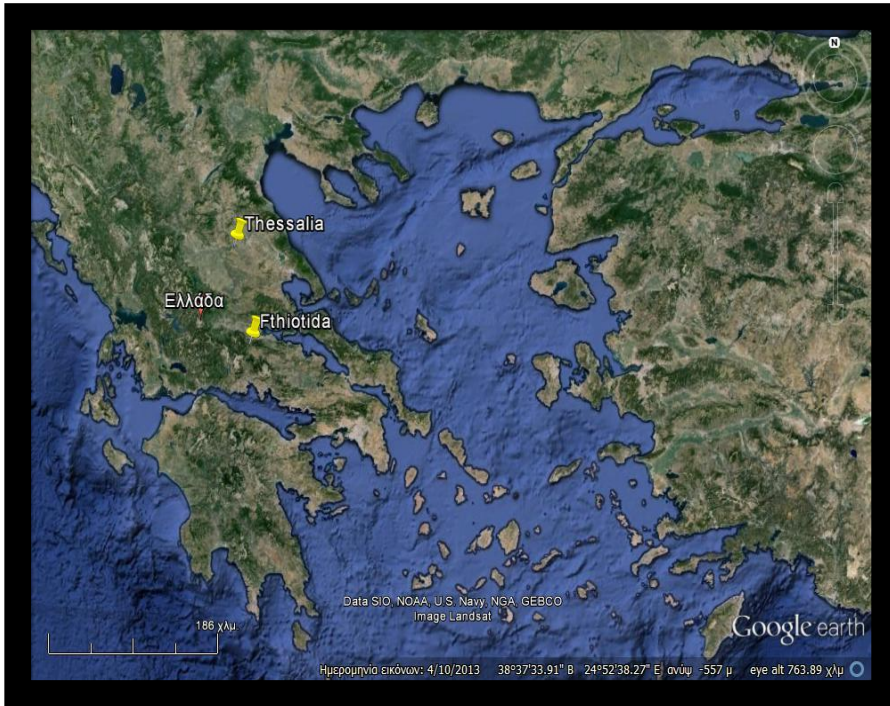
In the region of Fthiotida, I visited villages around the mountain Oiti. A local girl from the car rental office and the hotel owners introduced me to the community and then found more people for me to talk with. This so-called snowball method of finding respondents was also practiced by visiting a monastery and a traditional cafeteria, "kafenio" which is traditional meeting point in every Greek village. The main source of data in the second area, Thessaly, was visits to veterinary offices in a village and a small town. These visits offered the opportunity to talk with breeders and veterinarians from many places around the mountains. Every interviewee was guaranteed anonymity however some of the interviewees did not give permission to record the discussion, in these cases detailed notes were kept.

Additionally, there are two more semi-structured interviews that were not recorded, and detailed notes from long visits at two veterinary clinics. Those visits offered great opportunities for discussions with locals and participant observation of discussions related to the wolf between those who were present. Particularly, the veterinarians proved valuable facilitators as they initiated wolf related discussions and then introduced me in to participate as well. Moreover, it was great source of data to observe their discussions with the stockbreeders and their dynamics within the discussions. Complementary information was gathered with informal interviewing with random people, like breeders on the way from one village to the other, owner of traditional cafeteria in a village, hotel owner, a monk from monastery in the area and whoever was local and seemed like willing to get engaged in a short conversation.

3.2. Locality

The empirical data was collected by visiting villages in two rural regions in Central Greece, Fthiotida and Thessaly. For confidentiality reasons the particular villages will not be named here. The regions were chosen based on recommendation from specialists for the presence of carnivores in Greece, George Iliopoulos and Thanos Tragos based on the severity of conflict in the area, mostly caused by the numbers of wolf attacks

and other incidents (Iliopoulos et al., 2009). In total duration of the field work was twelve (12) days.



The first site was in Central Greece, the district of Fthiotida where five days of the field work were spent. According to G.Iliopoulos, populations of wolf were settled in the areas around and in the mountain Oiti, in 2000.

The Mountain Oiti is a protected natural area and it was declared as National Park³ in 1966 in virtue of the Law 218/1966, according to the provisions of the Law 856/1397 “about National Parks”. The National Park comprises 7.000 hectares (approximately the 1/4 of the mountain area), 3.370 of which form its core zone and the remaining 3.630 forming the peripheral zone.

According to the statutory framework of Mountain Oiti National Park, the core zone has full protection status in order to preserve the area’s present flora and fauna. Consequently, within the core the following are forbidden: excavations, placement of advertisement tablets, industrial activities, construction of buildings, agricultural and silvicultural activities, pasturing, hunting as well as the operation of mines and quarries.

Villages in the broad area of Thessaly were the second field site where seven days were spent. In this case villages in the roots of the mountains where populations of wolf have always been around were visited based on recommendation from T.Tragos.

³ <http://oiti.gr/?q=en/content/protection-status>

3.3. Techniques of Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted either in the hotel, in interviewees' homes or in cafeterias and they lasted approximately 45 minutes. The starting question varied according to the profession of the interviewee. The flow of the discussion was initiated with some personal questions about their profession in an attempt to create an informal and relaxed environment. Next, they were asked general information about the wolf like "*Has the wolf always been here?*", "*have you ever had any personal experience with wolves?*"

Focus group interviews took place in two homes and they also lasted approximately 45 minutes. They were both conducted with stock breeders and members of their family. In these cases apart from data from the discussions, group dynamics and how members engaged in conversations between them brought a valuable dimension to the data collection.

In addition to the semi-structured interviews and focus groups, participant observation was practiced throughout the field trip. There are several reasons that this strategic method was deployed. It was of high importance to become a familiar with the community, of the home I visited, of the group I was discussing with. In order to get the best understanding of what people think and talk it is essential to capture the emotions and gestures of the interviewee; any information that might be important and not captured in an interview transcript. This type of otherwise missed data included pictures on the walls in the homes, gestures, jokes and sayings in the local dialect and how these were practiced in groups' contexts.

Informal interviewing was the best thing to do with people that didn't have time to talk to more thoroughly. These included cases like stopping the car and talking with stockbreeders on the way to some village, talking for a while with people that had something to say about the wolf but who did not wish to engage in a longer discussion with a researcher.

Therefore the format of information gathered is voice recordings, notes from semi- structured interviews, notes from observations which include gestures, voice level, silences in between discussions, expressed suspiciousness, ways in which people talked with each other, pictures from the interiors of their homes. Additionally, sayings, jokes and phrases pertaining to the wolf were documented as information perceived as cultural influences. The above presented information is accelerated in the following table.

Table of Collected Empirical Material					
	Number of Times	Number of Participants			Finally used material
		Occupation	male/female	recorded/not recorded	
Semi-structured interviews	6	4 Breeders 1 employees at the National park 1 local ornithologist	all males	5 recorded	4
Focus- group interviews	4				4
visits to veterinary offices	2	3 veterinarians ~20 breeders 1 forest guard	all males	not recorded	
visits at homes	2	5 breeders	4 males and 1 female	2 recorded	
Informal talking	7	car rental employee, hotel owner, monk, 2 owner of kafeneios, 2 breeders, employee at the National Park	4 males and 3 females	not recorded	2
Participant Observation	(-)	(-)	(-)	(-)	

3.4. Limitations and barriers

The initial intention was to talk with as many locals as possible. However, this was not always possible because sometimes people were not even aware of the presence of wolves in the area. In contrast, farmers, stockbreeders and people who were somehow engaged in local government or in nature conservation were much more positive in being interviewed. Therefore despite the initial intention to get an understanding of the local community's perceptions on wolves, after the field trip, the topic was focused on breeders and veterinarians. It is important to state, therefore, that the sample of local people that were interviewed cannot be considered the voice for every local person.

An additional limitation that emerged was the difficulty in getting to interview women. Most of the interviewees were men and the voices of women are lacking from this study. Access to women is often difficult due to the cultural characteristics of the local communities, a challenge that continued to face ethnographers in the field (Saucy, 2000). However, this is a sign of the local culture as well and should be further discussed in another study.

While it was easy to access the local community in the first site of Fthiotida, this was not the case in the second, Thessaly. This may be attributed to the fact that in the former location I was staying in a hotel in the area while in the second I was commuting some distance to get to the area every day. This more overt outsider status did not facilitate my getting to know the local residents. As a result most of the semi-structured interviews were conducted in the first site, while in the second there were less semi-structured

interviews and more notes from visits to the veterinary clinics. The data acquired from the informal interviews conducted the veterinary clinics proved highly valuable and enhanced rather than compromised the quality of data. The limitation, rather, lies in the comparison of type of data generated in the areas. Although a comparison of the understanding of the presence of wolf is not the purpose of this study, it would be more valuable to have gathered similar types of data from both regions.

The visits in the veterinary offices, as discussed above, were valuable and important, however it was difficult to keep track on how many people I talked to since breeders were coming and leaving all the time and I was focused to engage them in an informal conversation or make them participate in the discussion we already had when someone arrived. As a result I don't have a clear number of the people I spoke to but they are approximately 15- 20.

These limitations should be kept in consideration when reading this report and will be considered as improvements in following research.

4. Social Representations of Wolf in Central Greece

In this chapter the content of the empirical data of the research will be presented based on the theory of social representations. The results are displayed in the form of the two components of the structural approach of social representations as they were introduced from Abric (1993): *central core* and *peripheral elements*.

4.1. Central core system of representations of the wolf

According to Abric (1993) the characteristics of the central core system of social representations are their linkage to historical, sociological and ideological conditions and therefore are characterized by their connection to the collective memory of a group. Stability, coherence and resistance to change make the central core system to define the homogeneity within the group. According to (Quenza, 2005, p. 81) the core elements of a social representation can be words, metaphors, images and attitudes.

The central core social representations of the presence of the wolf in the surrounding area shared by the selected social group are those that depict consensual ideas within it, which are rooted in the past and comprise strong meanings, stable through the time. The empirical data collection portray that the wolf is consensually attributed characteristics like "smart", "artful", "threat", "problem", "outlaw", "bloodthirsty".

The respondents used narratives from personal experiences with the wolf or stories they have heard from the older people, about the wolf in old times. Narratives about the way whole villages were coping with the presence of the wolf was also a way they used to talk about the animal and its presence. They were using metaphors and sayings about the wolf in the local dialect while discussing matters not directly connected to the wolf indicating that the presence of wolf has passed into the local culture. Jokes with the wolf and its' behavior were also reported.

When interviewees were asked to talk about the wolf they began by recalling stories from the past when the wolf was treated as outlaw. Their narratives depict how wolf was perceived 30 years ago, when killing a wolf was not just a legal thing to do, but was even compensated from the state. A veterinarian narrates that:

“Many years ago, when a wolf made appearance in the area, 20 to 30 people from the villages were going to the forest find and killed him, they wouldn't let him in the area. Later on that the wolf hunting was illegal and they only killed wolf If was found in the flock, and no one would notice”. (Veterinarian, P)

Some of them had personal experiences of hunting wolves before it was illegal and others just discussed what they remembered.

“In old times, when someone killed a wolf, he would bring it to the village to show around and he was given cheese, a lamp, money... as a rewarding for protecting them from bad. Once I went with them. We killed the wolf and then burnt him... that was the directive” (Veterinarian, P)

“When I was a child wolves were hunted and they were brought in the village and people were giving money to the hunters” (Breeder, KS1)

Later on, they refer to traits of the animal's character. The wolf is generally perceived as an “artful”, “bloodthirsty”, “shy” and “smart”. In discussions among breeders or in narratives from semi-structured interviews, breeders and veterinarians are talking about the wolf as an animal that is hard to cope with:

“The wolf is a bloodthirsty animal. He eats meat rarely; he usually prefers to drink the blood” (Veterinarian, K1)

“The wolf has this idiom that he doesn't want to eat, usually it's all about blood, he catches the animals and he sucks their blood. If it is possible, he will even catch 5, 10, 15 just to suck their blood, eating the flesh comes second.” (Breeder, L01)

“It's a very smart animal and wolves are able to communicate with each other, when they howl. Very smart animal... one might stand for the other in order to climb to the sheep pen. One is even capable of vomit in order for the other one to eat.” (Breeder, L01)

It was also evident that the wolf was perceived as a problem and a threat. All the respondents expressed the opinion that the presence of the wolf in the area is a major problem for the breeders and this makes them feel threatened. The problematic dimension was reported both in sayings and jokes used from the respondents as well as in discussion narratives:

“The wolf has always been a problem! Don't you know the joke about the wolf? - A breeder has a son and sends him to study at the university! After a couple of years, he meets with a friend and his friend asks him “How is your son doing? What is he studying?” and the breeder replies “oh my son... he is still studying... he is studying to be a wolf!” and his friend wonders... “A wolf?” and the breeder reply “Yes! When he left I had 400 sheep... now I have 200”” (Veterinarian, K01)

“The wolf is a huge problem for us... it has always been and it will always be... there is no solution” (Breeder, L04)

During a visit to one of the veterinary offices, a breeder enters and starts discussing with the veterinarian. The veterinarian asks the breeder how he is doing and the breeder replies with a saying *“I am trying... once the wolf ... once the bear”* meaning, as he explained, that he has one problem followed by the other but he tries for the best.

Mainly the wolf is associated with problematic situations because of the attacks to the breeders' herds. The wolf in their narratives is directly connected to threat for their animals and loss for their fortune:

“Wolf's job is to attack my herd, but my job is to kill him if he does so” (Breeder, L01)

“He [the wolf] can even kill 100 sheep; he might choke all of them, meaning to ruin them” (Breeder, KS2)

“It is very rare that the wolf won’t catch a sheep from the throat. He always tries to catch them from the throat and tries to kill them- it’s a strong animal.” (Breeder, KS3)

It was then perceived by most breeders and veterinarians narratives that the wolf is seen as a threat, a bloodthirsty animal and his presence in the area as problematic. However, almost all the respondents, made a distinction between the “old” and the “current” wolf. The old wolf is described as wild, shy, very strong and masculine. While the current wolf seems for them to be familiar with the human presence and activity and he is described as not the *real* wolf:

“The old wolves, when dogs were barking they would leave, these ones they don’t” (Breeder, L02)

“Nowadays the wolf comes into the villages, the old times the wolf never entered the village... the wild wolf never came in the village” (Veterinarian, K01)

“Forget about the wolves, now the wolves are genetically modified, they are not as they were in the past. It’s just a few of them being big most of them are small” (Veterinarian, K02)

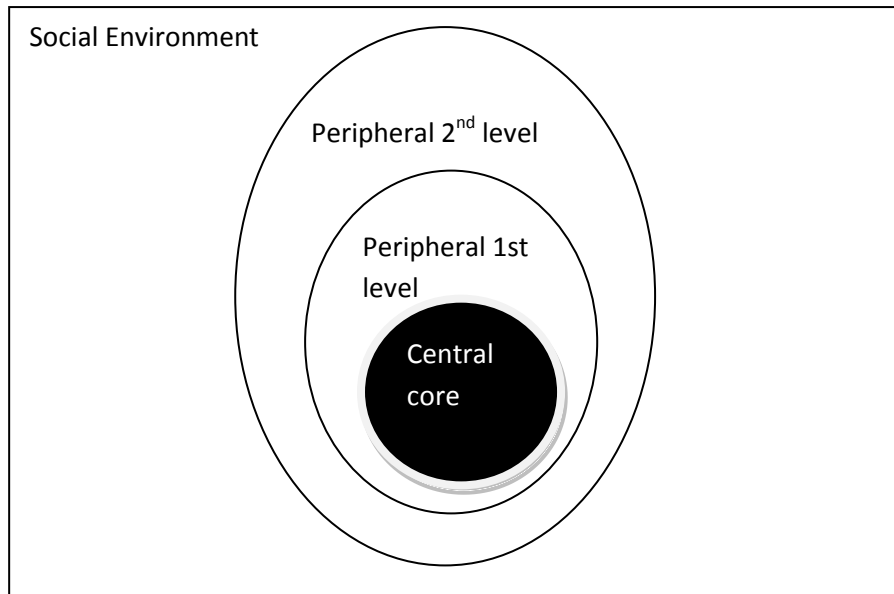
“The old times the wolf was fed in the woods. In order to come closer it should be foggy or the place should be controllable. These wolves now they go wherever...” (Breeder, KS3)

To summarize, the central core representations surrounding the wolf presented above are collectively shared representations within the social group constituted by breeders and veterinarians in the area. The core representations are enduring, slow-to-change and not immediate reactions to new events; they signify the basic and relatively non-negotiable premises for the shared representations. This section showed that their roots in the past and their relation to historical and social surroundings can be recognized in the local sayings, metaphors and jokes, as well as stories recalled by the respondents.

4.2. Peripheral system of representations of the wolf

In this subsection the peripheral elements of the representations of wolf will be presented. According to the structural approach (Abric 1993:76) the peripheral elements are those representations that allow the individuals within a group to integrate their personal experiences and support the heterogeneity within the group. Peripheral elements could be described as personal understandings that function as support of the central core elements, in a way that the central core and the peripherals constitute a unity. Subsequently, the following peripheral elements of the representations of the wolf are supporting or protecting the central core elements which were demonstrated above.

The peripheral elements are presented in two levels. In the first level peripheral representations which are direct related to the wolf, the animal as such, are presented while in the second level are the representations that refer to the wolf in a more indirect way, like policies, compensations, etc. This distinction is made only in order to facilitate the presentation of the peripherals and bring out the multiple issues that are touched. This two leveled division in presenting the peripheral elements is attempt to highlight the explanatory and communicative use of the social representations from the social group and highlight the “sensitive and determine by the immediate context characteristics”(Abric, J. C, 1993, p. 76) of the peripheral elements. The illustration below depicts how the theory is understood and utilized in this research.



4.2.1. 1st level peripheral elements

The vast majority of the respondents referred to the releases, some with certainty and others with suspiciousness. *Hybridism, population of the wolf, the naturalness of the wolf's presence and illegal hunting* were main characteristics related to the wolf and its presence which were discussed and the categories more or less related to each other, therefore, the classification between them is made according to their discursive and not cognitive attributes. It should be underlined, that although the peripheral elements function as support to the central core elements they also provide channels of heterogeneity within the members of the group. As shown in the following lines, heterogeneity was not overly significant in the peripheral elements of this case.

4.2.1.1. Secret Releases

The respondents brought up in the discussions thoughts, believes and attitudes towards and about the presence of the wolf that are mainly related to secrete *releases of wolf*. Narratives about the secret releases were dominant and all the rest of the peripheral elements were directly or indirectly connected to them.

The *releasing* scenario emerged in every discussion sooner or later and almost all respondents expressed the opinion that the present wolves are not like the old ones because now the wolves are secretly released. Sometimes the discussion was starting with breeders expressing their frustration towards those who release wolves. The releases were always used as cause of the character of the “nowadays wolf”, which is not wild as it used to be. A breeder expresses his suspiciousness about the release of wolves by wondering “*A wolf, a wild wolf, how anyone can put a collar on him?*” (Breeder, V01) while another breeder (L02) states more explicitly “*they release hybrids of wolf and not real wolf*” and another one stated “Some have seen people on the mountain with a car and a cage, and most possibly they had released wolves because if it was any other animal, they wouldn't have put it in a cage...” (Breeder, V01)

There were only two persons that did not share this belief, a veterinarian (Veterinarian, P) and a former forest guard, yet for different reasons. The veterinarian (P) portrayed the releases as an urban myth and said that “*anything about releasing wolves is an urban myth. Nothing is true. They say that they release, wolves,*

snakes, bears...” and he connected that myth with other dominant myths in the area which have nothing to do with wolves. The forest guard on the other hand, didn’t believe that the wolves were ever released but was talking with certainty about releases of bears. He was having a discussion with a veterinarian (Veterinarian, K02) who supported the scenarios about releases

Veterinarian (K02): tell me why the wolf nowadays, is not how it used to be and it’s different...

Forest Guard: yeah ok... this is not ...

Veterinarian (K02): that’s the truth... if it was the old wolf he should try to survive and we would say well done boy ...

Forest Guard: this is not happening... the wolf is always a wolf

Veterinarian (K02): If he could he would stay... and then anyone would grand him for managing to survive... but now with those that they let go...

Forest Guard: come on now, they don’t release anything... if you want we can talk about bear releases, that I personally know that they do release... but wolves... no... they haven’t brought...

Ecologists, mainly meaning Non Governmental Organizations (NGO’s) protecting the wolf in the area, always appeared to be responsible for those releases. All breeders accused the NGO’s for the protection of the wolf, albeit some more animatedly than others. Suspicions raised included NGOs taking money from European Union (EU) and Greek Government in order to protect the wolf but eventually keeping the money for themselves, and release wolves.

“When you have no proof you cannot say anything, but lately we have come up to the conclusion that, there are some groups, that have expressed their interest for the wolf in the area, and the monitoring of the wolf and specifically for some wolves that were killed, not in our area, in other places. There were found chips on their ears and collars for monitoring them, they are transmitters and they find their exact position... and yeah... from that, we can conclude, that those wolves are bred somewhere and at some point they are released out in nature” (Breeder, L04)

“They say that they don’t release, but we are sure 100% that they do. How could be possible to find wolves wearing transmitters on the mountain? It is not an animal that you could have as a pet and just let it go... they go to the mountain, release them and then find them” (Breeder, V01)

Breeder (KS3): I will only tell you one word... Non Governmental Organizations for the protection of wolf...

Interviewer: What about them?

Breeder (KS3): What about them?! They breed, they take money, they breed them and then release them to the environment

“They get allocations from abroad, that money is sent for the NGO’s... for the ecologists... who should survive on the mountain... us or the wolf? That’s what they do and the countryside is desolated” (Breeder, V01)

Along with the narratives about the money NGO’s get from EU and the Greek state, which from some appeared to be the reasons of the releases, there were more explanations that breeders and veterinarians brought up in the discussions. Those were that the wolves are perceived as a vulnerable species which is under protection and so a breeder stated that *“they are released so the species won’t be extinct”* or because

the wolf belongs to what is called *wild nature*: “*they are releasing wolves to create wild nature. Wild nature is to have wolves, lions, bears...*” (Breeder, L04)

4.2.1.2. Wolf population and Naturalness of wolf's presence

There were also narratives about the population of the wolf which were connected with the releases. The respondents expressed the opinion that the population of the wolf is not the number that the NGO's are saying rather they are much more. This judgment was linked to the *unnatural* presence of the wolf in the area. “*We wouldn't mind if it was naturally in the mountain. What bothers us is that some people come in the area and they destroy our fortune...*” a breeder (KS2) says. Also a veterinarian (K01) states that “*the last ten years, it is madness, there are too many, their population has become too big*” and later on he continues that “*Me as a Vet, I believe that the population of the wolf is bigger than it should, the area here has become a breeding ground of wolves*”. Another breeder shares the same concern about the population of the wolf in the area and its naturalness:

“I don't think that the presence of the wolf is natural... it's not natural, if the presence of the wolf was natural, I believe that there wouldn't be so many. They would be much less. The wolf, from his nature, he is around and all the animals belong to the natural chain and to the environment, and the wolf by himself... at some point will be killed from another animal. But here, we can see that his population is becoming bigger and bigger. Our objection is that the animal is not bred on its own; it should be bred naturally because it's a wild animal and not to be found with transmitters and monitoring systems so they know where it is... I wouldn't say that this kind of presence could be regarded as natural.” (Breeder, L04)

Those beliefs about the unnatural presence of the wolf and the secret releases of the animal led to the perception that the wolf is a pest in the area. Respondents during the discussions were putting the importance or necessity of the wolf to question. Some of them mention that the presence of wolf has nothing to offer to nature and therefore is pest, which has no reason to be preserved or protected. This point was shared from breeders and one veterinarian (Veterinarian, K02; Breeder, L01; Breeder, KS3).

“What is your opinion? Is the presence of wolf essential? It might be but not so much, therefore, it would they should give permission to people to kill him and be bred [naturally]... if no one kills it what is going to happen? There will be too many!! There is no natural enemy for the wolf” (Breeder, K03)

“It doesn't matter if wolf gets extinct; because it doesn't contribute anywhere...there is no reason for the wolves to be so many” (Veterinarian, K02)

4.2.1.3. Illegal hunting

While more than half of the breeders who referred to illegal actions towards the wolf, mainly hunting and killing no one of course admitted any kind of personal involvement in an illegal act, many of them made clear that under specific circumstances they would kill wolf, even if it is illegal act. Illegal killing of the wolf was in the discussions as something people they know have done, and some of them have been arrested for. Breeders, were primarily confess that they would for sure kill a wolf if was caught on the attack to their herd while others admitted that they would kill a wolf if they would have just an encounter with them.

4.2.2. 2nd level peripheral elements

Apart from peripheral elements directly related to the wolf as an animal and its presence in the surrounding area, there were some matters pertaining to the presence of wolf which were indirectly connected to the subject, but still very dominant and important to be presented. All the respondents when discussing about the wolf, touched upon issues related to the compensations they get from the state when they have losses from wolf attacks, relations of trust between them the NGO's and the Greek state and last but not least, they expressed their complain as regards their involvement in decision making processes when it comes to their interest. Those issues depict peripheral elements that function for the social group as means of explaining and communicating their social environment connected to the presence of the wolf.

The majority of the breeders, when talking about the wolves, during the interviews or when discussing with each other, were making a direct connection to the wolf attacks on their herds to the issue of the compensations. Despite the fact that almost all the breeders believe that, even though they are compensated, the best case would be if the wolves don't attack their herds, some of them expressed their objection on the ways the compensations are dispensed. A breeder (V01) is saying that *“What we want is them to stop releasing wolves, we don't want compensations we want nothing, we are not interested in compensations. Compensation is nothing for us”* meaning that the damage they undergo after a wolf attack cannot be compensated. While another breeder (L04) argues that it is good that compensations are given however the procedure sometime is more time wasting than it should be, or other issues as for example a breeder states *“the breeders are not well protected from the state when it comes to wolf issues [...] if the compensation was better it would make it easier for the wolf to be protected.”*

Related to the discussions about compensations are trust issues that respondents brought up. Many of them, when proposing alternative ways to dispense the compensations to the breeders, argued that it is all about trust. They put in question the trustworthiness of the way breeders and state cooperates, meaning that there is lack of it from both sides. State does not trust the breeders and breeders do not trust the state. The draw this conclusion from the way things are working between them all these years, a breeder explains that he is not satisfied from ELGA⁴ because even though he pays his fee his not getting enough money back. The state on the other hand doesn't trust the breeders, according to them, because if they make the procedure easier and faster, then there might be breeders who will try to get compensated for damages that never happened.

The way the procedure of compensating is planned from the state, was often criticized from the breeders and veterinarians. They argued that the employees responsible for the matters related to their job, are not well informed regarding the difficulties the breeders are going through due to their profession. They are feeling distant from the decision making processes when it comes either to regulations about their profession or about the area they are living. Breeders expressed that ecologists- meaning ENGO's- are have more power in decision making and their voice is always heard from the authorities.

Breeders appeared to be very suspicious about the relations between the State and the NGO's which are active in the area. Many of them feel that they are marginalized and the authorities are using the NGO's as channels to get money from the EU and then they are sharing the amount while some of them are used for the actual reason they were granted. However, it should be underlined that none of the breeders trusts the NGO's for the way they are managing their financials and they are all suspicious about their actions in the area. This skepticism towards the NGO's and their clarity was attested for them, when a scandal about fake

⁴ Greek Organization of Agricultural Insurance

NGO's was revealed those days in Greece. On the other hand, there was a minority of breeders who believed that the compensation system is working fine for them.

5. Analysis

It was previously mentioned that the structural approach used to present the social representations of the wolf provides a useful context to analyze the relation of the perceptions of breeders and veterinarians to the perpetuation of the conflict generated from the presence of the wolf. The central core elements portrayed the wolf mainly with negative characteristics such as "problem", "threat", "outlaw", "bloodthirsty".

These characterizations illustrate that the cultural- historical aspects and the collective memory of the social group ascribe the presence of the wolf with rather antagonistic attributes that more likely wouldn't support the wolf's presence. The peripheral element's analysis though is more critical to spot how these antagonistic attributes can be perceived as contribution to the conflict's perpetuation. Given that peripheral elements function like car "bumper" (Flament in Abric, J. C, 1993, p. 76) we can understand how the core elements stay stable through the time and give a better understanding of the views shared by the social group. The peripheral elements are important because they are connected both with historical, cultural aspects and the homogeneous components of social representations but in the meantime are "communicating" with the social environment. Therefore the meanings they "transfer" are of great importance because they show how new experience is adapted to be in line with the core elements.

The peripheral elements reveal some crucial issues in the ways breeders and veterinarians chose to talk about the presence of the wolf in the surrounding area. Interrelation of the peripheral elements was significant as all of them were connected to each other in various ways. Narratives about secret releases though can be considered as the cradle of the first level peripherals and the illegal hunting issue as a consequent practice. Trust related issues can accordingly be perceived as the center of the second level.

5.1. Released wolves

An identification of the peripheral representation of the wolf showed that the narratives about secret releases of wolves in the mountains constituted the prevailing explanation of the presence of the animal in the surrounding areas used from breeders and veterinarians, in regions in Central Greece. In line with social representations theory, this may be thought of as connected to a more enduring core representation of the wolf as an undesirable problem and threat in the area. The peripheral representation of 'released' was substantiated by almost every respondent's willingness to tell a story about people driving cars with wolf cages in the mountain. It can be noted that none of the narrators had a firsthand experience of these releases, but all of them referred to their source of this kind of information as trustworthy.

Such narratives can be viewed as rumors after Campion-Vincent's (2005) description that rumors can be perceived as "*truth claims that involve unsecured, unverified information; they are shared and transmitted because judged plausible*" (p. 108). Similar definition of rumor is provided by DiFonzo and Bordia (2007) which is that rumors are "*unverified and instrumentally relevant information statements in circulation that arise in contexts of ambiguity, danger or potential threat, and that function to help people make sense and manage risk*" (in DiFonzo and Bordia, 2007). This definition reveals three basic elements of the rumors: context, functions and content.

As it was shown in the results, the central core representations of the wolf shared by the breeders and veterinarians were, among others, that the wolf is a threat for their herds and fortune and in long-term even for their livelihoods in the area, while its presence was perceived as an essential component of problematic situations that they felt they do not know how to deal with. These positions expressed from the respondents show that they find themselves within an ambiguous and threatening situation, where they feel vulnerable and insecure. These feelings comprise the context in which a rumor is generated. As (DiFonzo and Bordia, 2007) discuss, the context in which rumors usually arise, is ambiguous and threatening situations where a group seeks to enhance the sense of security, which is shared from all members of a group, or can be seen as attempts to deal with situations in which people experience gaps in their knowledge (Shibutani, 1966, p. 163). This is closely connected with the functions of a rumor, while they provide the “hosts” of those rumors with what exactly they are in need of: a collective sense, understanding in an ambiguous situation or alternatively, a collective information, a way to manage threat and defense against harm to the collective sense of self (DiFonzo and Bordia, 2007); which in this case is the collective identity of the respondents as people related to the animal husbandry but also the local population of the area.

The gist of the rumor, as reported in the results, is that people have seen cars carrying cages, which are suspected as containing wolves, going to the mountains at night. The only reason, according to respondents' conclusions, those cars would go up to the mountain, at that time, would be to release wolves. That was the main point of the rumors and then respondents added some more information based on what they have heard or on what people they know, have seen. The content of those narratives are information sets of ideas that are transmitted through people sources that are trustworthy for the respondents but unverified (DiFonzo and Bordia, 2007, p. 24) which is an additional trait that distinguishes rumors from other forms of discourse: low level of formalization (Shibutani 1966:164).

It is not the first time these kinds of stories are used to explain and communicate the presence of wolf from groups of people (Campion-Vincent, 2005; Skogen et al., 2008). In France (Campion-Vincent, 2005) the same explanations were used after the reappearance of the wolves in the French mountains while similar stories about releases of animals like alligators, vipers are encountered in literature (Skogen et al., 2008). The circulation of these stories comes together with opinions related to complaints about prioritizing dangerous animals over humans (Campion-Vincent, 2005, p. 109). This accusation was found in the case examined here, when breeders felt that wolves are more protected than they are; as a breeder put it clearly “*who should survive on the mountain... us or the wolf? That's what they do and the countryside is desolated*” (Breeder).

In Norway and France (Skogen et al., 2008) as well Sweden (Peterson, 1995) the story is repeated, people have seen tracks carrying cages at night. Narratives reported in those two countries are also found in the Greek case. In France people seem to be convinced that wolves are released because a wolf that was killed was found to carry a chip which, for them, is a clear proof of reintroduction, as it were the collars wolves wore for breeders in Greece. In Norway, people are based on the not expected social behavior of the wolf, because the otherwise shy wild wolf would not come close to places with human activity and therefore it is released. Those arguments were also reported in the results previously, with breeders expressing with certainty that wolves are released because they seem to be familiar with human presence and activity.

In Sweden in 1985, same rumors started circulating about releases of wolves and the NGO Swedish Society of Nature Protection was accused. The story was the same, a wolf was shot and it was said that this wolf was not a wild animal but one that had been released from captivity. (Peterson, 1995) argues that these rumors and legends circulated in Sweden at that time are rooted in two principal factors: “*the tradition of old times,*

in which wolves have been attributed with extreme cruelty and danger” and “the debate discussions mainly in 1970’s, which focused on the question how wolves could be brought back in a wild state in the pine-forest region of Sweden” (p.359). Similarities of the Swedish and the Greek case can be found based on the assumptions introduced by Peterson. The respondents reminisced about the old wolf and how it was treated as outlaw while they described behaviors towards the animal that could be characterized extremely cruel. They recalled how villagers killed wolves in the mountains and brought the half dead animal in the center of the village and got presents and money from the locals but also compensation from the state, a practice also observed in Scandinavia until the 1960’s (Peterson, Per, 1995, p. 360). The discussion about reintroduction of the wolf in Sweden could correspond to the funding of NGO’s for the protection of carnivores in Greece as stimuli that brought the wolf protection in the public discourse and national law. Two NGO’s in Greece are active in the protection of the wolf among other carnivores like bears, lynx and others present in Greek countryside mainly in Central and Northern parts of the country, Arcturos⁵ established in 1992 and Callisto⁶ established in 2004. The change of the way wolf was perceived from the law, from outlaw it became an animal under protection and the presence of the NGO’s in the area, can be seen as relatively rapid and erratic developments that jarred with breeders’ social representations of the wolf.

Interviews revealed that the NGO’s which are based in Thessaloniki, are taking action in *their* area in protecting the former outlaw, wolf. Breeders contended in their narratives that by criminalizing wolf killings, they are left with no way to protect and shield their herds from wolf attacks. In their perspective, in the conduct of the NGO’s appear nonsensical and without any point. All this frustration created by the breeders and veterinarians along with the reasons discussed above led to the construction of the releasing wolves rumor.

However, there is an aspect in this case that differentiates it from other cases where rumors are constructed as explanations. Local wolf attacks, as it was shown in the results, are not new; they only temporarily ceased during a few years and then started again. Breeders in Central Greece always had problems with wolf attacks, however before the establishment of the NGO’s, this kind of rumors are not reported.

It is interesting to note that while in other countries accusations for releasing wolves are often directed generally toward a nebulous regime comprising the government, politicians, resource management agencies and NGO’s, the respondents in this study were highly explicit in laying the blame on NGOs. In fact, when asked to define what they meant by the term ‘*the ecologists*’ as the culprit, they invariably referred to the NGOs and never the government or any public service. Still, the government was not a neutral stakeholder in the case of the secret releases, as for some respondents, the government was aware of the reintroductions and did nothing. This highlights the perception of a broader climate of complicity in wolf releases that finds similarities to concurrent wolf conservation in Europe. The feeling of being subject to this outside power, reflected in the social representations of secretly released wolves leads us to the next issue of the analysis: mistrust and breeders’ feeling of marginalization.

5.1.1. Trust relations and marginalization

During interviews and discussions, respondents were commenting on the Governments’ and public services’ stance towards the presumed releases from the NGO’s. More specifically, when accusing NGO’s they were asked to give their explanation on why doesn’t the state do anything for that situation led the

⁵ <http://www.arcturos.gr/en/main.php>

⁶ <http://www.callisto.gr/en/callisto.php>

discussion in the relations between them-the breeders-, the state and the NGO's. Those conversations revealed some interesting views that are connected to the releases and provide a deeper understanding of the socio-political aspect of the protection of the wolf in Greece.

This kind of incriminating rumors that appear to be so dominant in the narratives of breeders have found to be widely circulated "*among people who have limited access to traditional political power and who stand to lose the most as a consequence of current processes of economic and social change*" (Fine and Turner, 2001 in (Skogen et al., 2008, p. 123). Respondents expressed their suspiciousness or sometimes even certainties, that there are alliances between the public services and the NGO's that operate in the area for the protection of the wolf.

Suspiciousness of complicity and a hegemonic alliance has been expressed in citizens' perceptions of wolf management under the Habitats Directive in Europe (Bisi et al., 2007) In the Greek case, research has shown that numerous problematic aspects that can provide explanation of breeder's distrust towards the state and NGO's activities (Apostolopoulou and Pantis, 2009; Demertzis, 2006; Papageorgiou and Vogiatzakis, 2006). One of those was the lack of public participation and its relation to the mistrust towards authorities. The case of the wolf conflict in Central Greece is not an isolated case of mistrust in the country. Mistrust and fear expressed from locals has been attributed to the lack of public participation of several interested groups in natural resource management (Papageorgiou, 2001). Lack of involvement in the process has arguably aided the perception that wolves are secretly released in the night, highlighting the total lack of transparency in management practice.

Breeders' distrust is connected to their marginalization from decision making, but their narratives also brought in surface an urban-rural conflict. Their arguments in discussing those matters included opinions which are based on their feeling that urban people are in charge to take decisions for them while they have no connection with rural life.

This urban/rural dichotomy is also found in other cases when regulation are to be implemented in rural areas that somehow contradict activities and behaviors rooted in local traditions and culture (Krange and Skogen, 2011; Mischi, 2013; Skogen et al., 2008). Even though previous research has affirmed that adolescent's attitudes from rural and urban areas towards the human wolf coexistence in Greece are not differing (Hovardas and Korfiatis, 2012) it seems that breeders in Central Greece are not sharing the same opinion. Respondents expressed a feeling of strike/ aggression over their lifestyle and the life in countryside in general and a need of autonomy. Some of them even expressed fear that there is a secret plan aiming to abolish human life from countryside and the mountains. This finds parallels in Bisi & Kurki's (2008) respondents' contention within Finnish wolf management that "*[authorities and urban residents] are purposely devastating the countryside*" (Bisi & Kurki, 2008, p. 96) As an extension of subscribing to this narrative, some respondents voiced seeds of what can be termed resistance in order to protect their lifestyles and livelihoods. Such resistance is rooted in differential power relations whereby breeders experience a subordinate position towards the state and the NGO's and they use cultural means to change this relation (Krange and Skogen, 2011, p. 469). Some of the respondents made a clear distinction of sides, using terms "us" and "them" while they even expressed their anger by stating that if they ever see an ecologist releasing wolves in the mountain, he is going to be killed right away. It has to be underlined that this case, is not the first where rural population perceives environmental policies as threatening which sometimes it is not only cultural resistance taking place but also political mobilization (Krange and Skogen, 2011, p. 77).

Breeders and veterinarians addressed power relations by referring to politicians, NGO's and "ecologists" as a foe that has the means to get the public opinion to their side. This opinion rests on both the urban/rural dichotomy but also on the (lack of) opportunities that breeders have to express their ideas. More specifically, NGO's appear to have power, because they have the means to gain it: campaigns in cities. For the breeders most of the people living in the cities have no connection to nature and they support NGO's because they are doing campaigns and present nature as they want while for them, nature is something more than a weekend in the mountain. Politicians on the other hand, according to the breeders, are aware of the influence of NGO's on public opinion and chose not to oppose them because they want the public on their side.

Breeders stated that two additional reasons their voice is not heard is that the media chooses not to cover their opinions and that they lack the means and rhetoric to express themselves in a way that the NGO's do, because most of them are not well educated. Usually in their discussions they complaint that media in national level cover their issues present them like the uneducated minority that does not respect nature and wildlife, without giving them space to express their problems. Furthermore, they believe that they have to become more organized politically, legally and rhetorically to have a say in the debate. Their lack of knowledge when it comes to issues connected to law is a weakness which has to be defeated according to them, because NGO's are very familiar with this kind of information and this makes them feel powerless.

5.1.2. Naturalness and wilderness

Respondent's views on naturalness and wilderness were revealed in the discussions about the wolf and to what extent the animals' presence is natural. *Place* is a factor that is related to the construction of views towards nature (R. Bruce Hull, David P. Robertson, 2001) and the respondents showed a great connection of what they perceive as natural with the way they experience nature within their locality and profession. The majority of the respondents talked about the area in which they live and work as a strong component of their self identity. This relation to self perception and the natural environment can be understood as an example of environmental identity which is "*a sense of connection to some part of the non-human natural environment, based on history, emotional attachment, and/or similarity, that affects the ways which we perceive and act towards the world;*" (Clayton and Opatow, 2003, p. 45). Many times respondents claimed that they have lived all their lives in the mountains and they perceive themselves as "*more ecologists than the ecologists*". The way they were grown up and they make their living is totally connected to nature.

The conflict about wolves in the region reveals that "nature" is a word which is understood differently from various groups and this diversity has also been discussed within the scientific community (see Siipi, 2011, 2004). Breeders in their narratives presented themselves to be very knowledgeable as regards nature's processes however, their opinions touched upon natural processes with great instrumentalism. They connected nature with their living and their profession.

Wolves' presence appeared to be unnatural for them. The reasons for holding this opinion are connected to their view of nature and wilderness. This binary relation of nature and culture is an aspect found in exploring relations of humans with animals (Benavides, 2013; Figari and Skogen, 2011; Kleese, 2002). The *real* wolf, according to the respondents, is a wild animal and therefore should be kept outside the villages and not intervene their cultural space. There is clear dichotomy between the human environment and wilderness and the entrance of the wolf in the village is perceived as not natural, the wolf doesn't seem to belong to the human society environment.

Apart from the releases narratives that show the wolf to be brought to the area, they also discussed the value of wolf as an animal. A veterinarian (K02) argued that the wolf is not valuable by stating “*What does wolf’s presence offer to nature? Nothing! The only thing it does is to kill our animals*”. The unnatural state of the wolf is for some connected to the wild nature of the animal. As it was presented in the results, many of the respondents discussed the wolf as a hybrid, because it does not act like a wild animal and it is familiar with human presence and activity.

5.2. Acts of illegal killing

Acts of illegal killing of wolves was revealed as a crucial issue from the respondents’ narrations that had not been fully anticipated by the research. Most of the respondents referred to illegal activity as actions people they know have committed and as something they could possibly do in order to protect their herds but never admitted themselves have done so. Illegal hunting has been discussed in literature and analyzed as a sociopolitical issue (Essen et al., 2014). More specifically, illegal hunting of the wolf has been framed by breeders as “*necessary evil*”(Bell et al., 2007, p. 406) since it is the only thing they can do to protect their fortune. This perception may on the face of it situate the practice in a “*livelihood crime*” category(Essen et al., 2014, p. 9). However, given the feeling of marginalization revealed by the breeders’, perception of mistrust, lack of transparency and involvement imbues these illegal killings with a sociopolitical content which may allow these cases to be understood as partly political actions toward the regulatory regime. Moreover, the former outlaw status of the wolf arguably contributes to at least a hypothetical justification these acts, since it once legally, socially and economically established the wolf as an “*enemy*” to rural life, which was identified as an enduring core representation in the interviews. Narratives related to group hunting of wolf from the respondents attest that wolf hunting has penetrated in the local traditions and been instrumental in shaping their local identity and attachment to the customs of the place. As (Stoll-Kleemann, 2001, p. 378) puts it “*they appreciate traditional ways and regard them as a sign of responsible management and manifestation of best practice through shared management norms*” (2001, p. 378).

6. Reflections and Discussion

The aim of this study was to get an understanding of how the wolf is perceived from breeders and veterinarians in two rural places in Central Greece. People related to animal husbandry in those areas are important actors in the human-wolf conflict due to the numerous attacks to their flocks and the damages they cause(Iliopoulos et al., 2009). As such the research was premised on the contention that the protection of the wolf is not only a biological problem but it also touches upon crucial sociopolitical matters(Bisi et al., 2010, 2007). Those matters need to be analyzed in order to get an understanding of the conflicting situation and be acknowledged in later wolf management regulations.

The structural approach of social representations introduced by Abric, J. C(1993) was employed in order to get the best understanding of the respondents views on wolves. This analytical tool allowed accessing the cultural historical roots of the representations expressed by respondents. The core and peripheral distinction provided fruitful information as they are a way to understand how actions in the social environment are integrated with the non-negotiable representations of the wolf consensually shared by the individuals.

The narratives depicted that the central core representations of the wolf in the two areas examined in Central Greece portray the animal as “smart”, “artful”, “threat”, “problem”, “outlaw” and “bloodthirsty” while the peripheral system is consisted from representations related to secret releases of wolf, the number of the

population in the area, the wolf as a pest and hybrid, illegal hunting, the compensations they get from the state, the wolf attacks to their herds and trust issues. These components of the social representations give us a view on how does this social group understand and communicate the presence of the wolf. They revealed their strong connection of the local cultural and historical aspect with current attitudes and practices-and therefore, gave us an insight to some possible reasons of the conflict going on in the area.

An interesting element on the analysis is that the peripheral representations had two characteristics. One is the, even though peripheral element, almost consensus belief of the secret releases among the respondents. The second are the two main themes identified which were analyzed in levels; first level is about peripheral representations directly related to the animal and its' presence: secret releases, number of population, pest, hybrid and illegal hunting and the second level are socio-political issues like trust, feeling of marginalization and the compensations. As it was explained in the results, the distinction was just a tool to emphasize the multiple issues that came up in the periphery system.

Some crucial issues brought up from the results were analyzed and brought on the surface the sociopolitical and cultural aspect of the wolf conflict in Greece. First of all, the negative attributions of the wolf in the central core elements attest an antagonistic environment which is not so dominant in other cases like Norway where the wolf was not given so negative attributes (Figari and Skogen, 2011). The reason, the content and the function of rumors related to secret releases of wolf expressed from the respondents as dominant peripheral representation show us that they found themselves within ambiguous situation and are connected with the feeling of marginalization they have when it comes to decision making which eventuates to be a reason of the perpetuation of the conflict. The releases narratives are very much connected to the rest of the peripherals as a reason while the acts of illegal hunting are consequent practices which have their root in the negative central core elements.

Skogen et al (2008, p. 131) has explored similar narrations about secret releases of wolf, and has categorize them as cultural resistance. Given the feeling of marginalization, the distrust towards NGO's and the state and the ambiguous situation they are, breeders in this case can also be perceived as a subordinate group that perceives an economical and cultural threat and therefore challenges social trends(Skogen et al., 2008, p. 131) and deploys cultural resistance as reaction. The reason that these rumors are so dominant and widespread is because their function is very important: they support a collective sense of the ambiguous and threatening situation while they provide "*a sense of autonomy and help bolster "rural pride", but (...) they do not result in the political influence that would be needed to course the development in rural areas*" (Skogen et al., 2008, p. 131).

The ineffectiveness of the cultural resistance practices to create a change has resulted to make breeders feeling marginalized and as "trapped" within NGO's and public services alliances which they are sure that are taking place and the regulations for wolf protection are perceived as threat to their rural way of living which is connected to their self-identity.

The reason that breeders are only accusing the NGO's for actually releasing wolves while in other countries public services are also accused for this kind of actions, is possibly because the state is not taking actions of protecting the wolf. The lack of an action plan for the protection of the wolf in Greece and the NGO's as only actors in this, make breeders and veterinarians connect the wolf only with the organizations. The crisis and the tough period the country is going through have possibly fueled negative feelings and trust issues towards the government and especially when it comes to financial issues. Besides, as it was discussed in the analysis the trust and the lack of public participation has been a negative factor in the implementation of

nature conservation regulations in other cases in Greece as well as in other countries (Apostolopoulou and Pantis, 2009; Bisi et al., 2007, p. 311).

The urban-rural dichotomy which was discussed in the analysis goes in line with other studies of perceptions locals about the wolf like in Finland where the expressed opinions that *“those who are most eagerly protecting wolves were mainly living in the cities, and their positive attitudes toward wolves were based on the lack of experience of the wolf and its biology”* (Bisi et al., 2007). The feeling of marginalization shared by respondents is also a common issue in wolf conflicts (Bisi et al., 2007; Krange and Skogen, 2011; Mischi, 2013; Scarce, 1998; Skogen et al., 2008). However, the reasons of the emergence of this feeling should be explored in each country separately because the *“wolf conflict is commonly viewed as social phenomenon and its appearance and increase in importance may be connected to social structures of society”*(Bisi et al., 2010, p. 779) which are differing from country to country.

The socio-political aspects of the protection of the wolf were discussed in this paper and they confirm that the wolf conflict *“and its appearance and increase in importance may be connected to the social structures of society”*(Bisi et al., 2010, p.778)

It may be concluded that the wolf presence is negatively perceived from breeders and veterinarians in regions of Fthiotida and Thessaly in Central Greece. Those negative perceptions are strongly based on the local culture and history and are collectively shared. Any change in the social and political environment is translated to function as complementary reason to oppose wolf's presence. However, the research revealed many levels of the conflict that should be further explored or been taken in account for future wolf management action plan in Greece. I believe that an anthropological point of view for the connection of culture and history to the perceptions of locals in conflicting areas, and further reasons on the reasons of distrust between the stakeholders are important examples for further research, in order to come closer to a better understanding and hopefully resolution of the wolf conflict, in Greece.

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