

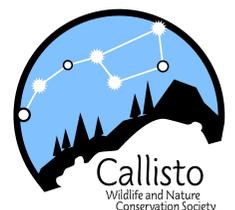
# A methodological account of human dimensions in wildlife conservation: Insights from the theory of social representations

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# Overview of the presentation

## □ Aim

- o How the theory of social representations (SRs) can inform human dimensions in wildlife conservation
- o Theory and methodology of SRs: Add tools to our toolbox

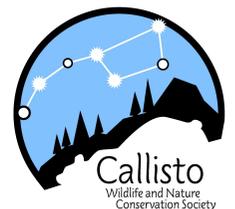
## □ Content

- o Theoretical assumptions and methodological considerations of SRs; findings of case studies
- o Topics: Interactional epistemology of SRs (1); dynamics of SRs (2); cognitive polyphasia (3)



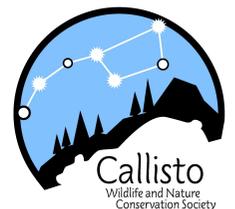
# The interactional epistemology of SRs (1)

- ❑ SRs are understood as **systems of ideas and practices** that address specific social objects, e.g., ‘nature’, ‘wildlife’ (Moscovici 1960/2008)
- ❑ Each SR refers to a specific social group, e.g., ‘local community’ (**interactional epistemology**; social origin of meaning): group ‘project’ (priorities, ideas, behavior); intergroup relationships
- ❑ The **diffusion of the environmentalist discourse** in rural communities – How do group processes mediate belief change?

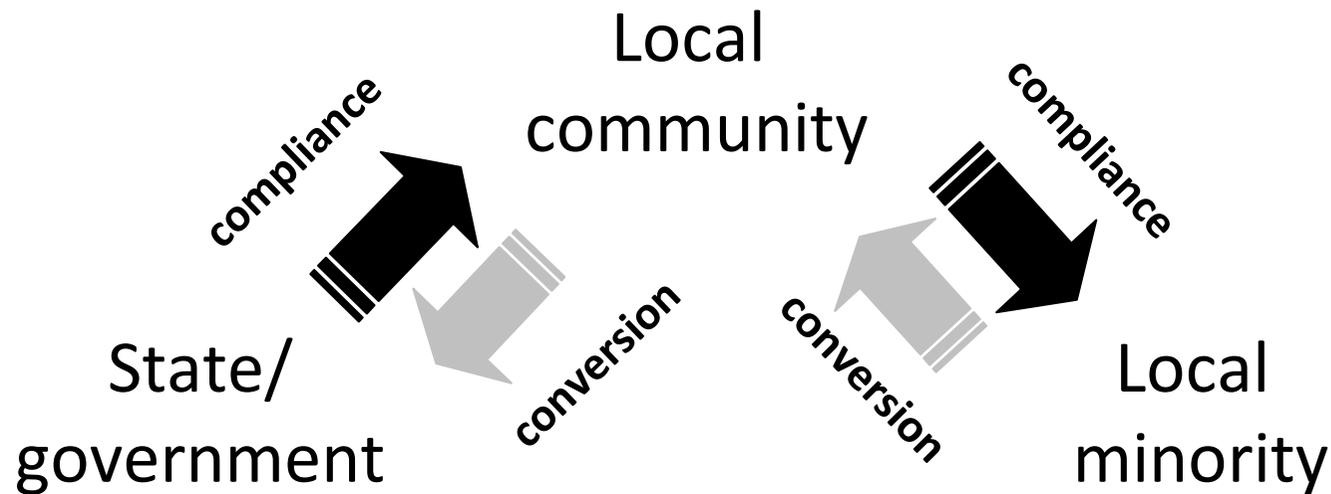


# The interactional epistemology of SRs (1)

- ❑ The effect of compliance mechanisms induced by majorities is usually readily traceable: minorities have to comply to the norm set by majorities (**majority influence**)
- ❑ However, **minorities can also exert social influence** (Moscovici 1980): minority messages may lead majority members to elaborate on new dimensions
- ❑ These unintended cognitive consequences increase the susceptibility of the majority to the minority position; if the minority persists over time, majority members may question their own views and ponder the minority position (**minority influence**)



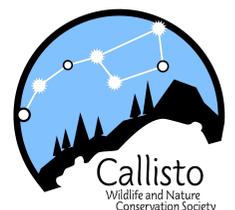
# The interactional epistemology of SRs (1)



- ❑ Double system of social influence mechanisms in protected areas (Hovardas 2010)
- ❑ Environmental NGOs: Intervene by both lobbying the state/government and by introducing innovation in local communities

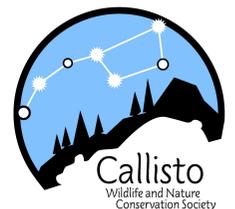
# Dynamics of SRs (2)

- ❑ **Changes in SRs over time** – novel and potentially threatening phenomena (establishment of protected areas; expansion of large carnivore range): social process of collective coping, rendering the unfamiliar familiar
- ❑ **Objectification** - projecting abstract constructs as concrete images, abstract notions become familiar by transforming them into images
- ❑ **Anchoring** – novel phenomena are associated with existing concepts, unfamiliar objects are embedded into existing systems of classification

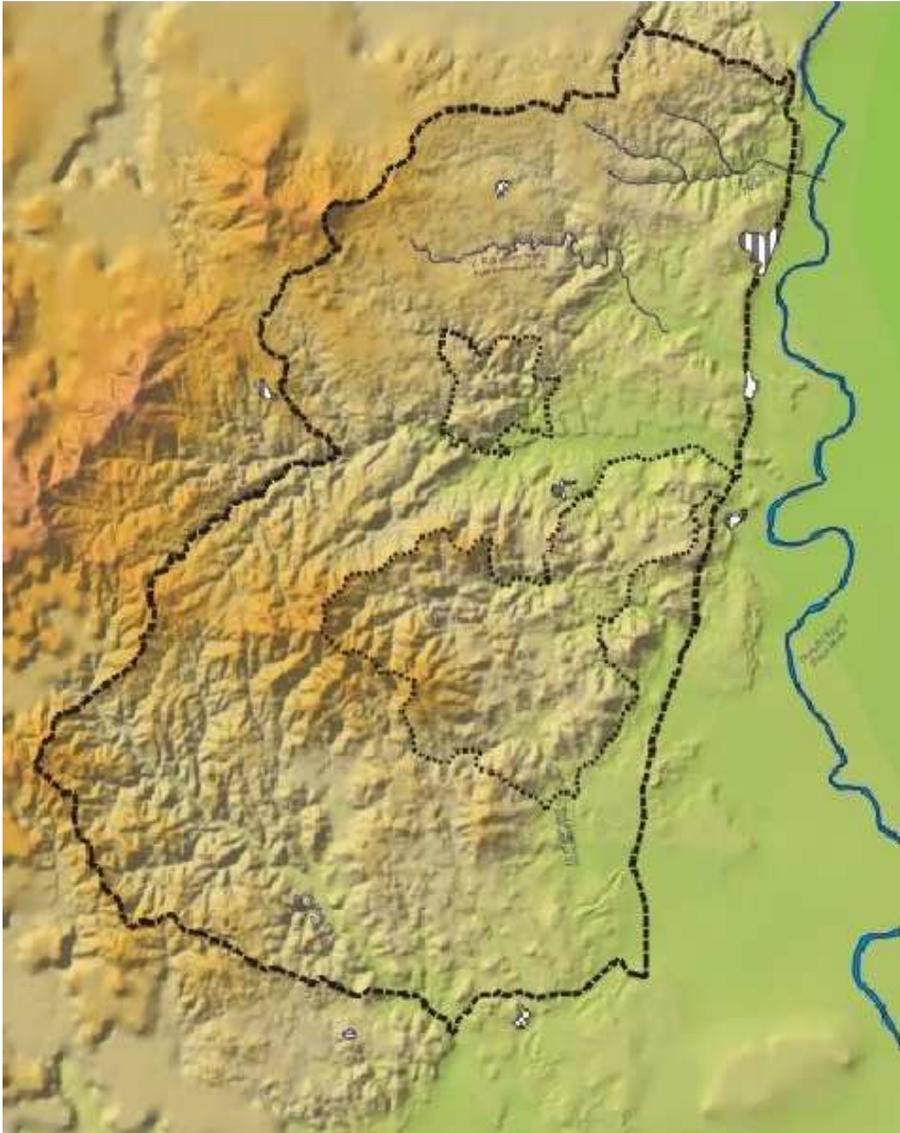


# Dynamics of SRs (2)

- ❑ **Establishment of protected areas;** changes in land use patterns and changes in people's ideas and practices
- ❑ **Zoning:** core zones in protected areas (strict protection; primary sector activities) and buffer zones (eco-development; ecotourism)
- ❑ 'Nature', 'wildlife', and 'landscape' as social objects for a local community might change over time after the establishment of a protected areas: construction of social objects (**land use changes lead to changes in SRs**)



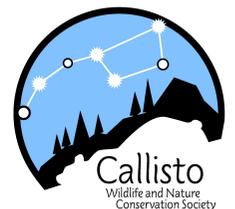
# Dynamics of SRs (2)



- ❑ In-depth interviews with rural residents in the **Dadia Forest Reserve** (Hovardas and Stamou 2006)
- ❑ **Objectification** – core zones are represented as ‘intact’ nature, devoid of human presence, animated by wildlife
- ❑ **Anchoring** – Core zones occupy one extreme in a continuum of human intervention (core zones = no intervention)
- ❑ The **rural landscape** is perceived as an interface between the natural (‘intact’ landscape) and the human-conditioned environment (e.g., built environment)

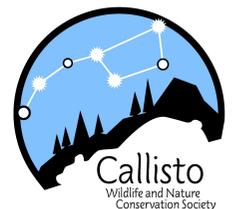
# Cognitive polyphasia (3)

- ❑ Coexistence of different, inconsistent or contradictory elements (e.g., scientific and lay knowledge): **different, inconsistent or contradictory rationalities** live side by side
- ❑ **Hybrid representational fields** that can accommodate old and new ideas; inconsistencies or contradictions remain largely unacknowledged, and enable flexibility in the negotiation social objects
- ❑ Flexibility in negotiating social objects: Cognitive polyphasia as an **adaptive discursive mechanism**



# Cognitive polyphasia (3)

- ❑ The **constructive potential** of cognitive polyphasia:  
Synthesis of scientific and lay knowledge to produce new modalities of reasoning
- ❑ Reflection of **power issues** that mediate intergroup relationships
- ❑ Confrontation of social groups and SR dynamics related to this confrontation: **holomorphic meta-knowledge** (attribution of representational elements to in-group or out-group members)



# Cognitive polyphasia (3)

**Scientific knowledge:**  
Vultures can only feed  
on dead animals

**Lay knowledge:**  
Vultures can consume  
big, living animals such  
as livestock



**Synthesis of scientific  
and lay knowledge:**  
Vultures usually feed on  
dead animals; when they  
feed on living prey, this  
includes nuisance  
species, e.g., snakes

□ Cognitive polyphasia in vulture feeding sources: Local residents in the Dadia Forest Reserve, North-Eastern Greece (Hovardas and Stamou 2006)

# Cognitive polyphasia (3)

**Scientific knowledge:** A hybrid reveals intermediate phenotypic characteristics as compared to parental species (hybridization)

**Lay knowledge:** Ecologists breed wolves through dog-wolf hybridization and release dog-wolf hybrids in the wild (wolf-reintroduction narrative)

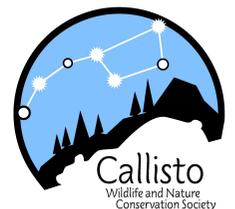


**Synthesis of scientific and lay knowledge:** Ecologists increase risks for locals, since dog-wolf hybrids reveal increased tolerance to human presence

□ **Cognitive polyphasia in the wolf-reintroduction narrative: Local residents in the National Park of Northern Pindos, North-Western Greece (Hovardas and Korfiatis 2008)**

# Summary and implications for HD

- ❑ The **interactional epistemology of SRs**; social influence mechanisms operating in protected areas (intergroup relationships): group 'projects', conflict
- ❑ Dynamics of SRs; **anchoring and objectification** (collective coping to address novel and potentially threatening phenomena): social construction of social objects (qualitative and quantitative research methods, triangulation)
- ❑ **Cognitive polyphasia**; coexistence of different or inconsistent or contradictory accounts: environmental education, science communication and outreach



# References

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