

# Predators, People, Prey — Power relations in wolf-related conflicts in Austria and Norway

## RESEARCH TOPIC:

Controversies about wolf management regularly flare up in the northern hemisphere. They highlight the controversial perception of wolves and their cultural, social, economic, and environmental impact on a supranational scale. Recent conflicts in diverse geographic regions have shown the need for research on people's attitudes towards wolf management and the search for solutions.

## OBJECTIVES

My dissertation project aims at shedding light on the various factors that influence clashing attitudes towards wolves and wolf management in Austria and Norway. The focus is on the various power relations, which play an important role in people's attitudes and views. The ultimate goal is to find ways to improve wolf management or to alleviate wolf-related conflicts, both between wolves and humans, but also between various human interest groups.

Human-wildlife conflicts and how they are dealt with have implications for broader conservation discourses and human-environment relations in general. Thus, the findings of the project may lead to a better understanding of other situations and issues.



Exhibition in Norway titled "ulvetider", literally translated to "wolf times", meaning times of crises

## METHODS

Data was gathered in Norway and Austria through problem-centered interviews and participant observation. An analysis of newspaper articles complements the findings from the data gathered in the field.

### FIELDWORK

I spent three months in Hedmark, Norway, and two months in the Waldviertel, Austria, to compare people's attitudes on wolves, observe how they actually deal with their (potential) presence, and how the issue is discussed.

### PROBLEM-CENTERED INTERVIEWS

Before, during, and after fieldwork, I conducted problem-centered interviews with representatives of diverse interest organizations, government employees, as well as local hunters, environmentalists, farmers, dog owners or other affected people. The interviews lasted on average three hours in Norway, and one and a half hours in Austria.

### PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

By participating in the daily life of hunters, sheep farmers, pro-wolf activists, and researchers and accompanying them on hiking, hunting, and research trips, I gained more in-depth insights into their lifeworlds.



Sheep shearing in the Waldviertel, Austria



During a moose hunt in Hedmark, Norway



Moving the sheep fence in the Waldviertel, Austria

## PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

### RURAL-URBAN STRUGGLES

An intersectional approach points to the myriad of power disparities that influence how the presence of wolves affects different interest groups. The struggle between rural and urban areas is very present in people's narratives. The **felt oppression of rural areas** and the ensuing helplessness and hopelessness frustrates rural residents and exacerbates the conflict, in which practical solutions then become secondary.

Whereas their presence does indeed generate practical difficulties for some, it is often wolves' symbolic role and associated emotional meanings that is in the foreground. As a result, they become scapegoats for various difficulties.

### WILD VERSUS TAME

An analysis along a wild-tame axis is also revealing. While in Norway the wild-tame dichotomy is more prevalent in people's attitudes towards the use of natural resources, in Austria, the necessity of maintaining a **"cultural landscape"** and the worry about the formation of woodland and scrub ("Verwaldung und Verbuschung") is predominant. In both cases, wolves are considered factors that prevent people from benefiting from nature the way they would like to.

### FOOD PRODUCTION

Food is a topic often mentioned both in Norway and Austria. On the one hand, this is due to wolves' effects on **"food production"** through **sheep farming, hunting or mushroom and berry picking**. On the other hand, food is also an important part of maintaining traditions and identity.

Vegetarians or vegans were mentioned in several interviews, sometimes as a symbol of the "city people's" lack of knowledge about nature (regardless of whether they actually live in urban or rural areas), sometimes as downright threat to rural dwellers' way of life.

**DORIS FRIEDRICH**

**SUPERVISION: PETER SCHWEITZER**  
**RESEARCH FIELD: SOCIAL & CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY**



**universität wien**  
Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology

**EARLY STAGE RESEARCHERS' POSTER PRESENTATION 2021**