

5. Conclusions

This study has shown that overall, positive attitudes towards wolves outnumbered negative attitudes in Germany in the measured period. However, while negative attitudinal expressions increased significantly in the sample of total publications, the number of positive attitudinal expressions decreased significantly in nationwide publications over the period.

The impact of wolves on ecosystems was least mentioned across all samples. Public attitudes appeared more concerned with the effects of wolf presence on their daily lives. Given that Germans are developing a stronger sense for nature conservation, this aspect should be emphasized stronger when promoting wolf conservation. Attitudes are more positive in cities, and consistent with that, attitudes towards wolves in Berlin were more positive compared to the regions with long and short wolf presence. Positive attitudes were relatively equal in both regions with wolf presence, which shows that knowledge alone cannot guarantee a more positive attitude towards wolves (Kaczensky, 2006). Negative attitudinal expressions were highest in wolf-free regions as well. Attacks on livestock and increased media exposure may have a negative effect on attitudes towards wolves, which would explain the higher number of negative expressions in the region with long wolf experience compared to the region with short wolf experience. The moderating effect of ambivalence on positive and negative attitudinal expressions cannot be ignored, however, the category of ‘ambivalence, polarisation, uncertainty’ remained relatively stable and at a low level throughout all measured samples. Considering the negative influence of the news media on attitudes towards wolves, the topic of

ambivalence may be worth further exploration in the wolf context, given how strongly the topic of wolf recovery is debated among the public.

A content analysis of attitudes towards wolves in the German newspaper media has not yet been carried out in the research literature. This study addresses this gap by providing insight into the content and amount of reporting on this topic. Overall, it shows that media analyses achieve a considerable range in the description of human-wolf coexistence. However, the media has a tendency towards sensationalising newsworthy subjects, a phenomenon that cannot be ignored. Nevertheless, in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the current situation, it would be beneficial to include a broader selection of media sources and different communication methods, such as social media, magazines and stakeholder e-papers. Furthermore, quantitative analyses cannot provide the same level of in-depth insight as can be achieved by qualitative research. Qualitative methods of analysis have the potential to capture important characteristics, perspectives and processes that shape attitudes towards wolves, thereby enabling a deeper understanding of the conditions for successful coexistence.