STUDY AREA DESCRIPTION

BRANDENBURG

GERMANY

CoCo

Co-creating Coexistence

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Funded by the European Union

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1 INTRODUCTION

The federal state of Brandenburg (NUTS1) in Germany is situated in the centre of Europe, surrounding the capital city of Berlin. Together, they form the Berlin/Brandenburg Metropolitan Region. Brandenburg spans a total area of 29,654 km^2, half of which (48.6%) is dedicated to agriculture. The remaining area is covered by forests (34.8%), whilst settlements, roads, water bodies, and other vegetation account for the remaining 16.6% (Statistik, 2022).

Brandenburg's landscape is relatively flat, rich in water bodies and the climate is continental. The unofficial anthem of Brandenburg "Märkische Heide" describes the region's typical landscape of heathlands, sandy soils, swamps, dark pine forests and ancient oak trees along its characteristic alleys, as well as its numerous lakes.

Figure 1: Areal photo of the landscape in Brandenburg (Photo Credit: Sandra Uthes)

2 OVERVIEW

- **Municipalities:** Brandenburg has 413 political municipalities.
- **Geographical size:** 29,654 km^2.
- **Human population:** 2.57 million inhabitants.
- **Number of livestock farmers (approx.):** 3.370 (Brandenburg, 2025).
- **Livestock farming systems:** Suckler cow farms, dairy farms, sheep and goat farms, pig farms, deer farms, horse farms.
- **Wild large carnivore species:** wolf and lynx (rare).

- **Wolf population:** 68 territories, 58 wolf packs (LfU, 2025a).

3 SOCIOECONOMIC CONTEXT

- Brandenburg is characterised by its largely rural landscape, dotted with numerous small towns and only a few high-density urban centres. The GDP per capita (in purchasing power standards, PPS) stands at 98.3% of the EU-27 average, which places it below the German national average of 118%. In 2023, the employment rate was 56.1%, also lower than the national average. Additionally, the population is aging.
- The degree of industrialisation is low compared to other German regions, yet Brandenburg benefits from its adjacency to Berlin. Commuter flows and spill-over effects in industries, including logistics, engineering, and chemicals, are particularly notable in areas close to the capital.
- There is an ongoing structural transition and investment directed towards cleaner, more knowledge-intensive industries. This represents a shift away from traditional heavy industries and coal, especially in the region Lusatia, which is also an important area for wolves.
- Brandenburg is known for its well-preserved natural environment and its ambitious natural protection policies, which began in the 1990s. 15 large, protected areas were designated following Germany's reunification. Tourism is an important sector.

Figure 2: Sheep herd with Pyrenean Mountain Dogs as livestock guarding dogs on rough land for landscape care (Photo Credit: Sandra Uthes)

4 FARMING CONTEXT

Poor soils across most of Brandenburg, in combination with low precipitation (averaging 550 mm per year, with a declining trend due to climate change), provide less advantageous conditions for crop production compared to other German regions. However, farm and field structures are rather large, with an average farm size of 245 ha, a relic of former socialist production units and land consolidation, which provides economies of scale.

Livestock husbandry, particularly of bovines, equines, and sheep, forms an important component of the regional farm structure. The most important farm types are specialist grazing livestock farms (37.8%), specialist field crop farms (36.9%) and mixed farms (20.7%).

However, lack of profitability and altered marketing and consumption patterns since Germany's reunification in 1990, have caused a considerable decrease in livestock numbers, particularly bovines. Livestock numbers are now at levels similar to those of 1946, directly after World War II, with an average ruminant livestock density of 0.3 units per ha. The observed decline of grazing livestock threatens the maintenance of extensive grasslands and their associated biodiversity (MLUL, 2014).

Main Challenges:

- Soil & climate limitations, risk from extreme weather events.
- Water scarcity and irrigation limits.
- Digitalisation and investment barriers, alongside market and price pressures.
- Wildlife damages, wolves, and livestock protection on ruminant livestock farms.

5 LOCAL CONFLICT ASSOCIATED WITH LARGE CARNIVORES

Until the Middle Ages, the wolf population in Brandenburg was relatively large and stable. However, with the expansion of deforestation and livestock husbandry, livestock depredation by wolves was considered a major problem resulting in organised wolf eradication programs, which eventually led to the local extinction of wolves by the end of the 18th century (Ludwig, 2017). During the 19th and 20th centuries, reports suggest occasional occurrences of wolves immigrating to Germany from Eastern Europe. However, these wolves were persecuted and typically killed.

Since Germany's reunification in 1990 the wolf has been under legal protection (EEC, 1992). In 2000, wolves started reproducing in Saxony, and in 2007, the first territorial wolves in Brandenburg were documented (Reinhardt et al., 2019; Schade, 2010). Since their recolonisation, Brandenburg's wolf population grew quickly and expanded along a South-East – North-West gradient, while some parts of Brandenburg remain uncolonised (DBBW, 2020). Concurrent with the expansion of the wolf population, the frequency of livestock depredation events increased (LfU, 2021). In response, state authorities initiated systematic monitoring of these events and provided funding for damage compensation, as well as for livestock protection measures, such as fencing, livestock guarding dogs

and operating costs. In 2020, annual expenditures in Germany for herd protection amounted to € 9.5 million, while compensation payments for livestock losses amounted to € 0.8 million (DBBW, 2020).

The increase in livestock depredation events caused by wolves (Kiffner et al., 2022), however, poses new challenges for grazing livestock farms in Brandenburg, particularly for shepherds and suckler cow holders. This potentially undermines political objectives linked to the support and expansion of grazing-based livestock systems (König et al., 2023).

Figure 3: Mixed sheep-goat herd of a wandering shepherd; grazing during the day guarded by shepherd, electric-fenced paddocks during nighttime (Photo Credit: Sandra Uthes)

Number of attacks:

- Between 2007 and 2024, 2,357 livestock depredation events were reported, resulting in 7,920 animals killed through confirmed wolf attacks, 83% of which were sheep (LfU, 2025b).

Social conflict:

- Farmers and livestock holders suffer from wolf attacks, losing animals (sheep, goats, calves) and experiencing damage. They demand stronger preventive measures and sometimes the right to remove problem wolves.
- Conservationists and nature protection groups generally oppose broad culling quotas, and emphasise non-lethal methods: prevention, compensation, legal protection of wolves.

- The financial and labour burden of preventive measures such as fencing and guardian dogs, falls on the farmers. Many argue that the state support is insufficient, or overly bureaucratic.
- Disputes exist over the speed and fairness of compensation payments, as well as over the conditions under which they are granted (e.g. minimum protection standards).
- Public tensions are amplified through protests (e.g., "wolf watches"), campaigns, media framing, with some speaking of "wolf romanticism", others of warning of a "wolf threat".

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