

Call for Papers

Nature and Culture Special Issue:

Human-Animal Relations in Times of Social-Ecological Transformation

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The human use of non-human animals plays a causal role in the emergence and intensification of socio-ecological crises such as climate change, species extinction, and environmental pollution (Twine 2024; Sebo 2022; Besek/York 2018). At the same time, animals are not only implicated in these crises, but they also exhibit agency. They are not only among the primary victims when, for example, their habitats are destroyed, they are affected by extreme weather events (Irvine 2009), or their chances of survival are impaired by environmental pollution. New forms of interspecies connection also hold the potential to contribute to social-ecological transformation and the resolution of these crises. While environmental science research increasingly addresses the need for global socio-ecological transformation to increase sustainable agriculture and ensure sufficient protection of animal habitats from intensive human use and resource extraction (e.g. Poore/Nemecek 2018; Eisen/Brown 2022), sociological analysis of these socio-ecological transformations remains in its infancy.

In sociological research on human-animal relations, studies have predominantly focused on interpersonal social actions concerning animals and the benefits or harms to humans (see Sebastian 2024). The articles collected in this special issue differ from the existing bulk of sociological research, focused on human relationships and interactions with animals and their social and symbolic status, by employing a research design that specifically examines the social-ecological figurations of humans, non-human animals, and their natural environment. The central focus is on socio-ecological crises triggered or exacerbated by human use of animals (such as climate change, species extinction, and environmental pollution), how these events, in turn, shape and impact the lives of both humans and animals and the role that animal agency and interspecies cooperation can play in the social-ecological transformation.

Historically, human-animal relations have been critically scrutinized through an ethical lens, questioning the legitimacy of various forms of human treatment of animals (e.g. Regan 1986; Singer 1996). In this discourse, animals are considered directly as affected parties based on their intrinsic moral value. A socio-ecological perspective on human-animal relations, however, complements and expands this ethical focus by conceptualizing the use of animals as "anthropogenic amplifiers" of socio-ecological crises. This approach allows for the examination of new dynamics and patterns of change in human-animal relationships. Although animals can be considered victims of these crises, ethical considerations may not sufficiently explain such dynamics. For example, people might attempt to reduce the number of farmed animals to mitigate climate change without attributing a moral intrinsic value or fundamental rights to animals. The necessity to transform human-animal relations to mitigate social-ecological crises might therefore result in a new pressure for change on human-animal relations, that might be more impactful than animal ethics.

The global efforts to strengthen ecological sustainability leads to complex and conflicting forms of social change that also encompass human-animal relations. This results in multifaceted socio-ecological transformation conflicts (Schad/Sommer 2024) regarding the future of societal relationships with animals, most prominently visible in the social-ecological transformation of animal agriculture and global land use

for species conservation and biodiversity. The dynamics of these conflicts, the underlying social power relations, interest divergences, and action strategies of the involved actors require sociological investigation in order to better understand the present and potential futures of socio-ecological human-animal relations. This also pertains to the remarkable persistence of hegemonic forms of human-animal relations, particularly in industrial animal agriculture, which highlights the real possibilities of obstructed socio-ecological transformations (Blühdorn 2021).

This special issue aims at encompassing sociological contributions on the above-mentioned societal phenomena and problems. This call for paper invites proposals on the following and similar thematic fields and focal points:

1. The role of non-human animals in the emergence and event of socio-ecological crises

- Which social practices, arrangements and/or structures are involved in the exacerbation of social-ecological crises phenomena, which kind of actor figuration/networks underlay them and which interests, power relations, cultural ideas and forms of knowledge shape these practices and structures?
- What is the role of governmental bodies, state-level and/or international institutions negotiating and shaping these issues and how can their influence be interpreted from a sociological point of view?
- How can the contribution of animal agricultural to climate change, loss of biodiversity, and environmental pollution be sociologically interpreted? (e.g. theoretical perspectives from historical-materialism, risk sociology, environmental sociology, actor-network theory, animal agency theory, posthumanism, postcolonial theory, critical animal studies etc.)

2. Conceptualizing animal agencies in social-ecological transformation

- Why and in what ways do animals become victims of socio-ecological crises, and what forms of societal responses and negotiation regarding this issue can be identified?
- Why and in what ways do non-human animals show resiliency and which possibilities for interspecies cooperation in responding to crises emerge from this?
- What role should non-human animals play in conceptualizing integrative environmental networks and impacts?
- In how far do non-Western epistemologies look to non-human animals for guidance and solutions to environmental issues? What can be learned from these perspectives?
- What role should the impact of anthropogenic social-ecological crises on animals play in questions of eco-social justice and/or animals rights?
- To what extent do non-Western epistemologies offer alternative perspectives on social-ecological animal victimhood?

3. Persistence or pathways out of the crisis? Dynamics of transformations in human–animal relations

- Which socio-ecological transformation conflicts are being fought over the future of human–animal relations in the context of climate change, species extinction, and environmental pollution?
- How can the continued persistence of the global model of industrial animal agriculture, despite socio-ecological pressures for change, be explained?
- How do relevant actors (such as farmers, policymakers, NGOs, social movements, corporations, consumers, rural communities) process the challenge of reconciling ecological sustainability in human–animal relations with economic profit and which alternative models can be conceived?
- What potential do social movements, non-Western epistemologies, and critical theories have in shaping a non-exploitative human–animal relationship?

Authors are invited to submit abstracts of a maximum of 500 words (including bibliography) by November 1st, 2025, to marcel.sebastian@tu-dortmund.de. The authors' guidelines for *Nature & Culture* can be viewed [here](#). Both theoretical and empirical contributions are welcome. *Nature and Culture* is a forum for the international community of scholars and practitioners to present, discuss, and evaluate critical issues and themes related to the historical and contemporary relationships that societies, civilizations, empires, regions, and nation-states have with nature.