

Research Project

Our Common Future? Animals and Sustainable Development

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“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (Brundtland Report “Our Common Future,” Chapter 2, §1).

This is limited to future human generations, of course. What about animals? How are they considered in the concept and practice of sustainable development?

This dissertation sets out to answer this question and thereby situates itself in the emerging and pioneering field of **sociological human-animal studies**. Human-animal studies examine the myriad, and ambivalent, forms of our societal relationship with animals.

Here, the topics of **animals and sustainable development should be brought together for the first time**. More specifically, the inquiry is made into which role animals, especially farm animals, play in sustainability concepts and policies. In the age of the Anthropocene, the examination of the environmental impact of consuming animal products has become a pressing issue. Slaughtering 66 billion land animals and more than a trillion aquatic animals every year, the **livestock industry amounts to the waste of natural resources and environmental degradation** and emits more greenhouse gases than the global transport sector (studies range between 14.5%-51% of global emissions, calculated in CO₂ equivalents).

Further, the animal industry is expected to double its production by 2050, which means that its “ecological hoofprint” will presumably double as well. During this same timeframe, the change in global surface temperature may well exceed 2°C by 2100, according to the latest IPCC report.

Acknowledging the urgency of the issue, this dissertation responds to the need for a comprehensive scientific investigation addressing the following two subjects:

Firstly, it explores **what animals mean for sustainability** by analyzing the **representation of animals in international declarations of sustainable development** from 1987 until today.

Secondly, it examines **what sustainability means for animals** by showing the **effects that these declarations have on animals**. These effects are materialized in **subsequent studies on the “ecological hoofprint”** that try to raise awareness on the biggest unnoticed cause of contemporary anthropogenic climate change. Various **trends** can be observed here, among others the efforts of the animal industry to reduce their emissions, but in the same time increase production—by, for example, genetically engineering farm animals’ digestion; the development of environmentally friendly “in vitro meat;” or the

tendency towards “sustainable, happy meat.” In general, technological solutions following **ecological modernization theory** are predominant.

The international declarations on sustainability and the subsequent studies are examined in a **sociological discourse analysis**.

Relevant sociological research on animals and sustainability is lacking to date, hence, the dissertation's global aim is to close this gap in research.

Keywords Political Ecology, Animal industry, Sustainability, Sustainable Development, Human-Animal Studies, Animals, Environmental Sociology, Intersectionality, Climate Change, Food

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