

NONHUMANS AS STAKEHOLDERS: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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**JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO
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mention about the use of AI tools in the work

AI language learning machines such as ChatGPT features minorly in this thesis. This tool was used to shorten and summarise text that I had written myself in order to save time, reduce redundancies, and create a more coherent narrative flow. AI was never used to generate original ideas, generate citations or sources, or create insights for the analysis. Particularly due to the large volume of text this thesis dealt with, there were often many pages of my notes or text that needed to be shorted into a much more concise summary, so I entered that material with prompts such as "please summarise the following such that it maintains as much of the original information as possible, but eliminate redundancies" or "the following text should be re-ordered such that it fits a more cohesive and narrative flow. can you please outline such an order for me, and then return the text, with the original content, such that it follows this more cohesive structure?". While most of the text in this thesis has been re-edited by me such that it follows my personal style of writing, some of the structure in the later sections, such as conclusion, may still contain some of the structure that was presented to me by the AI model.

In addition, I asked the machine to highlight where it had made changes to my original text, so I could ensure no crucial information had been changed or eliminated. By using AI in this way, I was able to enhance the clarity and conciseness of my writing, thereby improving the readability of the thesis, while losing as little of my original writing style, insights, and synthesis as possible along the way.

ABSTRACT

Author Madeleine Eve Shachat	
Title Nonhumans As Stakeholders: A Literature Review	
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Abstract <p>In this thesis, the concept of nonhumans as stakeholders, and the argumentation for or against this conception in academic literature, is approached through a scoping literature review methodology. The scoping review methodology was employed particularly due to its suitability for analysing emerging topics, such as the one of nonhuman stakeholdership. The research questions guiding this thesis were designed investigate how nonhuman stakeholders are defined, discussed, and represented in academic literature, and to gather information on the dominant theoretical frameworks used to ground their inclusion or exclusion as stakeholders. The study identifies key themes and arguments for and against the inclusion of nonhumans as stakeholders, ultimately revealing a lack of consensus and a variety of perspectives within the literature. The findings show that while the discourse on nonhuman stakeholders has grown significantly, particularly within the last 3 years, the topic remains largely underdeveloped in some areas, with a major issue being a lack of consensus on which kind of nonhuman stakeholder should be considered in the literature. This research highlights that the overall conception of nonhuman stakeholdership is still emergent and contentious within academic literature. The findings are also divided into three distinct eras to highlight the evolution of thought from a niche focus on the environment to a broader consideration of various nonhuman entities. Based on the synthesis of recommendations and conceptions across 64 reports over 30 years, the research agenda emphasizes the need for interdisciplinary approaches to better integrate nonhuman perspectives into stakeholder theory and practice, with many scholars advocating for a paradigm shift in how organizations engage with the nonhuman world. By systematically synthesizing the findings from the selected literature, this study addresses an existing research gap in stakeholder theory and lays the groundwork for future research in multiple disciplines, though the findings indicate that this topic is particularly relevant for environmental management and sustainability.</p>	

<p>Keywords nonhuman stakeholders, stakeholder theory, corporate environmental management, sustainability</p>
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INTRODUCTION

The impetus for this research stems from a multifaceted inspiration: to align with the field of Corporate Environmental Management (CEM), and to engage with the expanding critique of Institutions' inadequate response of the urgency of current environmental crises. A critique of CEM and Management practices in general is that current strategies, rooted in outdated paradigms, are at best insufficient, and at worst antithetical to effective and just sustainability. The ecological crisis is deeply entrenched in the human/nature dualism that values non-human life and ecosystems purely from an instrumental and economic basis (M. Phillips, 2019). Theorists across varying disciplines have increasingly explored the implications of living in the Anthropocene, examining our trajectory, mitigation strategies, and the potential need to redefine our interactions with the non-human world for a sustainable future. The dominant episteme of our era, man-nature dualism, has been critiqued as fostering unsustainable human-non-human relationships and increasing existential risks (Ruuska et al., 2020; Tallberg et al., 2024; Imbrogiano, 2024).

As such, scholars such as (Merskin, 2021; Heikkurinen et al., 2016), argue this necessitates a shift in perspective towards 'strong' sustainability (Ruuska et al., 2020). The normative impetus for this research thus stems from two areas: the Anthropocene and environmental crisis, and the normative call for business and management to shift to more holistic, deep ecological approaches.

One recent framework which has been introduced to address this challenge is "Planetary Wellbeing". The concept of planetary wellbeing, as formally introduced by (Kortetmäki et al., 2021) addresses the inherent tensions between human and nonhuman well-being in the context of ecological crises. This perspective shifts the focus from individual well-being to the broader processes of Earth systems and ecosystems, acknowledging the moral considerability of both human and nonhuman entities. The approach aims to transcend the limitations of existing frameworks, such as anthropocentric orientation and methodological individualism, which impede the integration of human and nonhuman well-being considerations. The Planetary Wellbeing Initiative aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and defines planetary well-being as the highest

attainable standard for both human and non-human beings and their systems (Kortetmäki et al., 2021). This concept necessitates interdisciplinary collaboration and substantial theoretical and empirical effort to address global challenges and promote societal transformation, as emphasized by (Antó et al., 2021) and (Kortetmäki et al., 2021). The relevance of this concept to the current review is multifaceted. (Birkin & Polesie, 2013; Frohlich et al., 2018; Kortetmäki & Laitinen, 2019) underscore the importance of considering planetary wellbeing in the context of environmental and social management and governance, both in the public and private sectors. Inevitably, introducing the planetary wellbeing framework into business and management contexts means shifting commonly anthropocentric conceptions – such as human only stakeholder theory – to include more than just human actors. Thus, the subject of this review; nonhumans as stakeholders, has emerged as growing topic in business ethics and management discourses, particularly with respect to the environment as a stakeholder.

While still not a mainstream topic, the notion of including more than humans as stakeholders has been present in the literature for nearly 3 decades. There have been many arguments for expanding stakeholder theory in this direction, such as the assertion by Hart & Sharma (2004) that organizations may lose competitive advantage if they continuously ignore the legitimacy of 'fringe' stakeholders, including nonhuman stakeholders. Others have argued that denying reality independent of the human subject is "disturbingly anthropocentric" (Heikkurinen et al., 2016) and severely limits the ability to solve complex ecological problems that organizations now face. In relation to planetary well-being, there is a need to consider how environmental and social management and governance can be improved to better incorporate the interests of a wider group of actors, not just the 'usual suspects'. This is related to the call to incorporate the interests of nonhumans, instead of marginalizing them and continuously viewing them as illegitimate. Thus, there is growing recognition that expanding a popular theory such as stakeholder theory is a leverage point for creating more robust sustainable management practices and perhaps mitigating some of the inadequacies present in modern day responses to the climate crisis.

While stakeholder theory is intended mainly as an ethical guide with an end goal of being operationalized in real business contexts, the notion of nonhuman stakeholdership is still niche enough that the reality of its conception in management is rather scarce (see [section 2.3](#)). In light of this, this review is interested in particular in the academic conceptions of this topic. Much like the origins of stakeholder theory itself, it can be inferred that the academic conceptions of this topic may eventually inform how nonhumans are engaged and perceived in management, thus fulfilling the normative goals in planetary wellbeing. Academia has historically been recognized as a key institution for the generation of credible and legitimate knowledge (Boswell, 2008). However, its role in legitimizing knowledge is evolving. Knowledge regimes within academia are influenced by various external factors, which in turn shape the perception of

what is considered legitimate (Phillips, 2019). Academics are a group known for leveraging their authority to democratize knowledge production and promote progressive intellectual and political ends (Lave, 2015). Despite setbacks in challenging private-sector environmental knowledge claims, academics remain successful in facilitating the democratization of knowledge production (Lave, 2015). Since the topic of this review has proven to be niche and largely critical of dominant perspectives in management, it is traditionally a good starting place to examine academic perspectives, rather than practitioner or public perspectives, since the former is likely to have an influence on the latter. This is thus a justification for why the academic perspective in particular is explored in this review. In this review, the academic perspective is represented through various kinds of publications, which include journal articles, books and book chapters, conference papers, and Doctoral dissertations. The methodological rigour and transparency of the work varies between these kinds of documents, with peer reviewed works considered the most reliable (Boswell, 2008). However, due to the emergent nature of this topic, the selection is expanded to include other academic works. This was done both to supplement the sample size and gain a more holistic insight, and also due to the recognition that, while not necessarily peer reviewed, conference papers and doctoral dissertations are generally accepted as valuable sources of information and insights within academia (Boswell, 2008).

1.1 Research Gap

As per the justification of why this research is relevant, there exists no current literature which addresses the research questions in this review. The research that currently exists on non-anthropocentric stakeholder theory is both recent and sparse as compared to other areas in stakeholder theory discourse. When it has been suggested, such as recently by (Smart, 2022); Kortetmäki et al., 2023), we are given a nascent framework which has still yet to be robustly accepted or implemented both within academic and practitioner discourse. Indeed, since this is such an emerging and somewhat 'fringe' topic, it was important to investigate if there had yet to be any kind of systematic literature review on the topic. As this review will show, while aspects of this topic are discussed in depth across various disciplines, no systematic literature review has been conducted on the topic to date. Thus, this research aims to fill the existing gap in the literature to address how academic discourse overall conceptualizes nonhuman stakeholdership, and what kinds of theories, arguments, and terminologies are dominant.

To address this, a scoping review of the academic perspective was deemed the appropriate approach. This approach is discussed in further detail in the Methodology section.

1.2 Research Questions

Given the above research inspiration and areas of interest, the research questions for this review are as follows:

RQ1: How is nonhuman stakeholdership conceptualized in the existing literature?

RQ2: which type of NH stakeholder is most commonly conceptualised in the literature? What is the basis for inclusion/exclusion?

RQ3: What are the key themes and frameworks that emerge from the literature regarding nonhuman stakeholders?

RQ4: Based on these results, what does the future research agenda look like for this topic?

1.3 Objectives and Structure

The objective of this research project is to form a review of how nonhumans have been conceptualised as stakeholders (or nonstakeholders) based on the given literature. In this review, the term 'stakeholdership' is analogous to 'as stakeholders'. The conceptualization of this, grounded in the theoretical framework, is understood more precisely as scholarly discussion and argumentation on the concept of nonhuman stakeholdership. This refines the discussion to more precisely understand what the current perception is on the legitimacy of the concept itself, rather than to broadly explore how often nonhumans are mentioned as stakeholders in academia. The latter, while also a valuable insight, does not fit with the impetus of the study, which is to better understand what argumentation researchers are employing to legitimize or delegitimize the concept within stakeholder theory. These better suit the research aim which understands academia as a discourse, where norms are socially constructed. In this way, it offers a more nuanced perspective on what nonhuman stakeholdership means as an emerging concept in academia.

The aims of this study are approached by conducting a scoping literature review. Such reviews offer a compressive picture of where this topic is situated in a given discourse, as well as identifying any major gaps, trends, and themes in the literature for future research on the topic.

The structure of this review is to first provide a summary on the main theories which form the underlying theoretical basis of this topic. This provides a foundation for the reader to understand the context and aims of the review, as well as providing a tool to form relevant analysis for the findings.

The methodologies are then described, giving a background on the methodologies themselves, and justifying the methodological approach for this review. The tools used in the methodology are then described.

Following this is the analysis section, which details how the theoretical framework was used as an analytical lens to be applied to the data set. The results are then presented, introduced by a brief explanation of how they were generated and how they will be organized. These results include both a brief quantitative report based on relevant bibliometric data, as well as deeper qualitative analysis based on the research questions. Lastly a discussion of the implications of these findings are discussed, with a focus on what the research agenda may be, as well as a discussion on both the value and limitations of the study. Lastly, the entire report is summarized briefly in the conclusion. The appendices with the relevant data are in the end of the report following the reference section.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this research draws on stakeholder theory, originally introduced by Freeman in 1984, and the diverse streams of research and frameworks that inspired over the subsequent decades. The following section offers an overview of the theory's foundational concepts, its evolution, and key developments and debates. Particular attention is given to relevant aspects such as stakeholder classification, ongoing debates, and salience.

Stakeholder Theory, situated in the domain of business ethics, emphasizes the moral and ethical obligations organizations have to their stakeholders, extending beyond mere profit maximization. It was first proposed by Freeman (1984) who defined stakeholders as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of an organization's objectives" (R. Freeman, 2010; R. E. Freeman & Reed, 1983). This definition operationalizes the theory by positing that businesses should create value for all stakeholders, not just shareholders, emphasizing the importance of managing relationships with various groups such as employees, customers, and communities. Freeman's (1984) stakeholder theory provides a framework for identifying, prioritizing, and engaging with various stakeholders in a way that balances their competing interests while simultaneously fostering accountability and ethical governance. Freeman's (1984) theory evolved as a response to the limitations of the shareholder primacy view, established most notably by Friedman Doctrine, a perspective that dominated corporate governance discourse. The Friedman Doctrine (1970) reflects a shareholder-centric view of corporate responsibility, which argued that a corporation's primary obligation is to maximize shareholder value within the boundaries of the law. This doctrine asserts that ethical or social considerations exist outside the realm of business operations, creating a divide between profit-making and ethical behaviour – commonly referred to as the "separation thesis." Hence, the core of stakeholder theory and its relevance as a novel approach to business ethics can be traced back to Freeman's rebuttal of the 'separation thesis' concept. The separation thesis asserts that the discourse of business and the discourse of ethics can be separated, such that sentences like "is a business decision" have no moral content, and "is a moral decision" have no business content

(Jones, 1995). Freeman (1984) addressed the separation thesis arguing that such a separation is not tenable. He further proposed that stakeholder theory bridges the normative analysis of the philosopher and the empirical-instrumental investigation of the management scholar. Freeman's refutation of the separation thesis forms the foundation of stakeholder theory, by directly challenging the claim that "business ethics" is an oxymoron (Wicks, 1996). The evolution of stakeholder theory has been marked by its integration into broader discussions of corporate ethics and responsibility. To understand the context in which stakeholder theory emerged, particularly as a distinct theory in business ethics, it is essential to examine its key predecessor: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

2.1.1 CSR and Stakeholder Theory

CSR has a long and rich history as a theory in business ethics. CSR generally refers to a company's voluntary efforts to address social, environmental, and economic impacts, emphasizing businesses' broader responsibility to contribute positively to society. Over time, CSR has transformed from 'industrial philanthropy' to a more integrated business practice (Moon et al., 2017). The concept of CSR is generally attributed to Howard R. Bowen's work, *Social Responsibilities of the Businessman* (1953). Bowen's (1953) work marked the beginning of the modern period of corporate responsibility. While CSR focuses on the overall societal impact of corporate actions, stakeholder theory centres on the relational dynamics between the company and its various stakeholders, advocating for their interests in decision-making processes. As noted earlier, stakeholder theory not only challenges the Friedman Doctrine's shareholder primacy but also addresses the limitations of CSR. While CSR asserts that corporations have a responsibility to act as ethical members of society, it does not directly confront the separation thesis in the same way stakeholder theory does. CSR sought to counterbalance shareholder primacy by promoting broader societal contributions, whereas stakeholder theory redefined the purpose of business altogether, advocating for a balance among the interests of all stakeholders. This distinction is one of many that separates the two theories (Dmytriiev et al., 2021).

Stakeholder theory opposes shareholder primacy by emphasizing the interconnectedness of businesses with their stakeholders – employees, customers, suppliers, communities, and others. It challenges the view that business and ethics are separate domains, arguing instead for a more integrated approach. As Dmytriiev, Freeman, and Hörisch (2021) argue, while CSR predates stakeholder theory, the latter emerged as an independent framework rather than as an extension of CSR. Over time, stakeholder theory has provided a more nuanced way of addressing the ethical obligations of businesses through direct engagement with those impacted by corporate decisions. While CSR represents another significant stream of research within business ethics, directly challenging the Friedman Doctrine by asserting that corporations have a responsibility to act as ethical members of society, it does not address the separation thesis in the same

way Stakeholder Theory does. This distinction highlights one of the key differences between the two frameworks (Dmytriyev et al., 2021). In particular, Stakeholder Theory directly opposes the traditional shareholder primacy view, whereas CSR instructs businesses to counterbalance shareholder primacy by other measures.

The distinction between these frameworks is critical, as Stakeholder Theory embeds social responsibility into decision-making processes. Stakeholder Theory promotes a holistic approach to corporate governance by placing ethical and social considerations at the core of decision-making, ensuring that the needs and impacts of all stakeholders—employees, customers, communities, and the environment—are central to the company’s strategy and operations. The confusion between these frameworks has led to varying interpretations, with some scholars mistakenly viewing Stakeholder Theory as a subset of CSR. However, this perspective neglects their foundational differences and each theory’s unique contributions.

2.2 Variants of Stakeholder Theory

The following section explores the key variants of Stakeholder Theory. These three main variants—descriptive/empirical, instrumental, and normative—represent differing perspectives on the nature of the theory and its intended purpose. Each variant reflects a distinct view of what Stakeholder Theory seeks to achieve, which, in turn, shapes how researchers approach its application and utility. Understanding these variants is essential for this review, as they offer a framework for analysing the conceptions of stakeholder status within the broader theoretical discourse. By identifying which variant of Stakeholder Theory is operationalized in a given text, one can infer the researcher’s underlying perspective on the purpose of the theory. This perspective inevitably influences the type of arguments scholars construct to support or contest the inclusion of certain groups or entities as stakeholders.

Since its rise to prominence in the 1990s, Stakeholder Theory has been the focus of extensive research, generating a wide range of arguments, critiques, and debates (Laplume et al., 2008). Even in the earlier stages of its theoretical development 30 years ago, Donaldson & Preston (1995) noted that “A striking characteristic of the stakeholder literature is that diverse theoretical approaches are often combined without acknowledgement”. This led to a discussion on 3 distinct ‘variants’ of stakeholder theory, each of which have different implications for how the theory should be thought of and operationalised. These variants were first identified by (Donaldson & Preston, 1995) as: Descriptive/Empirical, Instrumental, and Normative. The normative aspect emphasizes moral obliga-

tions to stakeholders, while the instrumental variant links stakeholder management to improved financial performance, thus reinforcing the business case for ethical practices. The Descriptive/Empirical variant of stakeholder theory views the theory primarily by its ability to present and explain relationships that are observed in the external world, thus providing a framework for testing empirical claims related to stakeholder management (Donaldson & Preston, 1995).

Three Aspects of Stakeholder Theory

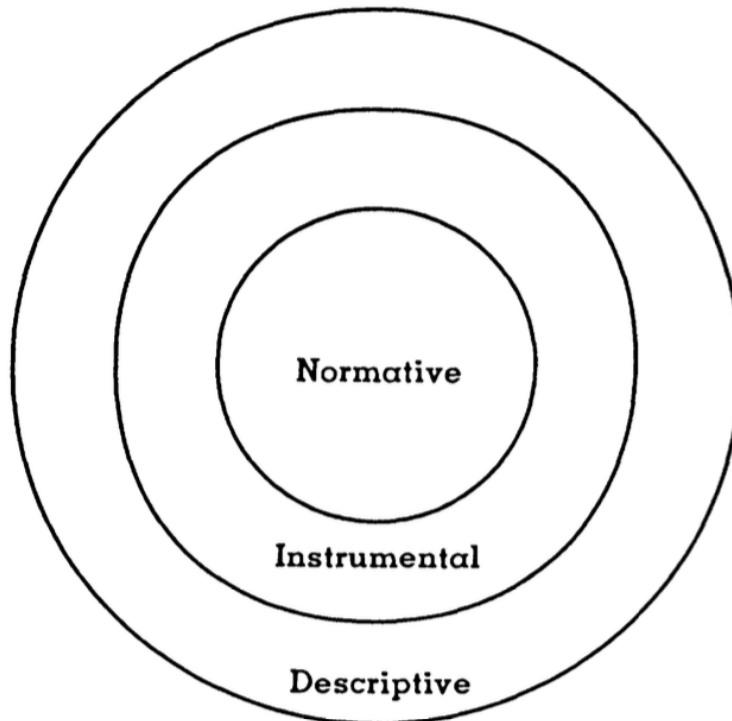


Figure 1: Donaldson & Preston's (1995) concept of the 3 'nested' stakeholder variants, or attributes

While initially viewed as distinct, yet 'nested' definitions by Donaldson & Preston (1995) (see figure 1), it was eventually advocated to combine and condensed the 3 variants of stakeholder theory into 'integrative' stakeholder theory. As highlighted by (Kortetmäki et al., 2023):

"Stakeholder theory contains normative, instrumental, and descriptive aspects (Donaldson & Preston, 1995) that integrative stakeholder theory inextricably links (Freeman, 1984; Freeman et al., 2010). The integrative version acknowledges that multiple normative cores offer standards of action and argues for the normative and practical acceptability of this pluralism (Jones & Wicks, 1999)"

While authors such as (Kortetmäki et al., 2023; Jones & Wicks, 1999) explicitly highlight and embrace the pluralistic approach to stakeholder theory that the integrative version offers, this is not always the case. Though it is not

always explicitly stated, theorists tend to justify their conception on 'who or what is a stakeholder' based on which variant of stakeholder theory they believe to be most valid. While popular works, such as by Donaldson and Preston (1995) argue that "stakeholder theory is first, and most fundamentally, a moral theory that specifies the obligations that companies have to their stakeholders", there is still no overarching consensus on if stakeholder theory should be a moral (normative), Strategic (instrumental), or Descriptive/Empirical theory.

2.3 Stakeholder Classification

Arguably, at the core of the theory, is the question "who/what is a stakeholder?" Several Stakeholder classification theories and models have since been offered to attempt to answer this fundamental and contentious question. Stakeholders were first defined as any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives (Freeman, 1984). This has later become known as the 'broad definition' of a stakeholder. There is still ongoing debate about how to determine who or what fits into the narrow definition of stakeholder theory, as well as debate on the functionality of the broad definition.

In response to this, Donaldson and Preston (1995) offered a distinction between wide and narrow definitions of stakeholders, emphasizing the implications of each approach. A wide definition, which includes "anything influencing or influenced by" the firm, is argued to lead to excessive breadth in stakeholder identification, encompassing 'external' actors like competitors and the media who may not have a specific stake in the firm itself. The wide or broad definition is drawn from Freeman's original definition of stakeholderhood. This broad interpretation is surmised to dilute the concept of stakeholders, as it includes those who do not stand to gain particular benefits from the firm's success Donaldson and Preston (1995).

In contrast, a narrower definition focuses on those with legitimate interests in the corporation, which are typically identified through existing contracts or quasi-contracts (Agle et al., 1999; Mitchell et al., 2017). this narrower perspective is more appropriate, as it aligns with the idea that stakeholders should be recognized based on their actual stakes in the firm, rather than merely their influence. This distinction is crucial for understanding the responsibilities of management in balancing the interests of legitimate stakeholders.

2.3.1 Saliency

Perhaps the most well-known framework which forms a basis for stakeholder classification is Stakeholder Saliency. The concept of stakeholder saliency has been essential to advancing stakeholder theory (Mitchell et al., 2017). Saliency is defined as the degree to which managers give priority to competing stakeholder claims, which is influenced by the attributes of power, legitimacy, and urgency possessed by stakeholders. First Proposed by (Mitchell et al., 1997) it has since become a pinnacle of stakeholder theory and management, as it offers a simple yet theoretically consistent framework both theorists and practitioners may use to decide who or what is a relevant and important stakeholder for their purposes. While other attributes have since been suggested, namely proximity by (Driscoll & Starik, 2004) the main three aforementioned attributes remain the most well-known and operationalized. The Saliency framework has allowed for a more nuanced understanding of stakeholder dynamics, with the saliency model suggesting that stakeholders can be classified into distinct categories based on the combination of the 3 main attributes. The specific combination attributes form the basis for classifying stakeholders into 8 typologies, ranging from highly salient to marginal. Based on this model, Stakeholders can be classified into several categories: latent, expectant, and definitive stakeholders. Latent stakeholders possess only one of the three attributes, leading to low saliency; expectant stakeholders possess two attributes, resulting in moderate saliency; and definitive stakeholders possess all three attributes, which grants them high saliency. Specifically, latent stakeholders include dormant, discretionary, and demanding stakeholders, while expectant stakeholders encompass dominant, dependent, and dangerous stakeholders.

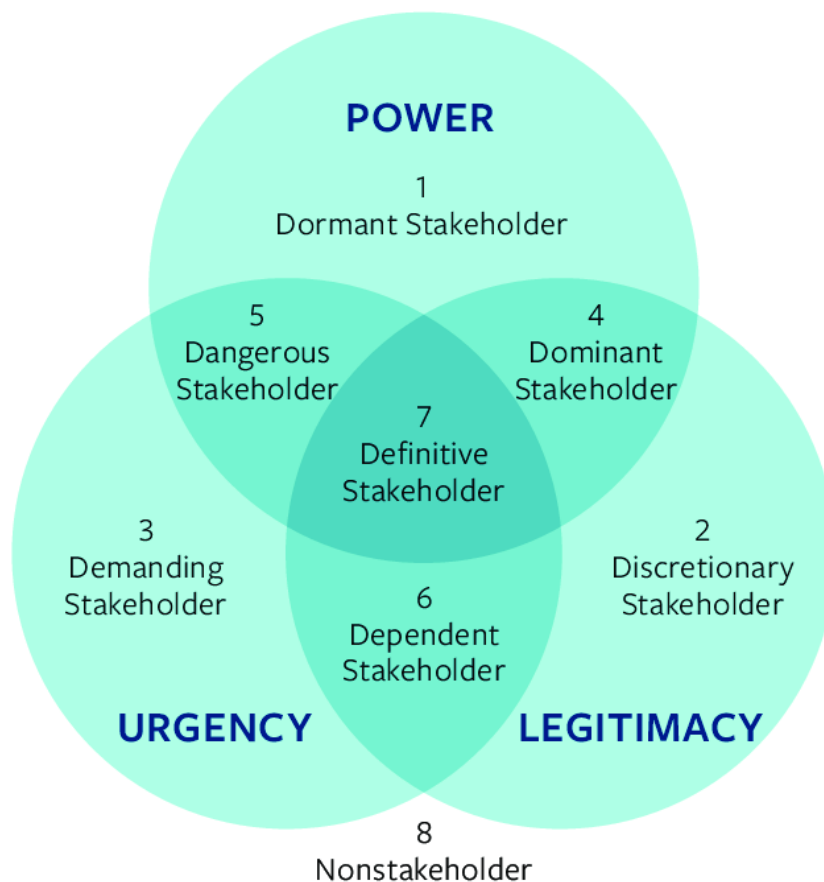


Figure 1: The Stakeholder Salience Model from (Kujala et al., 2019)

[Figure 1](#) details how 8 typologies of stakeholder may be classified based on their combined traits from the Salience model. A definitive stakeholder, by this definition, is considered most salient, whereas a nonstakeholder is least salient, and, by this theory, should not be considered.

2.3.2 Primary Vs. Secondary Stakeholders

The distinction between primary and secondary stakeholders is also critical in stakeholder theory. Primary stakeholders are those whose actions are ‘essential’ for the firm's survival. The groups which are typically included as Primary stakeholders are employees, customers, and shareholders. This typology of primary stakeholders is generally considered an *a priori* set, meaning it is pre-assumed that these are the most relevant stakeholders in any managerial context (Colvin et al., 2016). This is of particular relevance to this review, since introducing an atypical stakeholder group, such as nonhumans, forces the theory to contend with a rather unquestioned assumption that only these groups may be considered primary. This is discussed further on in section 2.2.3.

On the other hand Secondary stakeholders (sometimes referred to as external stakeholders) are those who can influence or affect the firm but are not essential for its immediate survival. Secondary Stakeholders are typically imagined as general 'external' groups, such media, interest groups, and the general public. This differentiation underscores the varying degrees of influence and urgency associated with different stakeholder groups, thereby informing managerial strategies and resource allocation (Mitchell et al. 2017).

2.3.3 Marginal Stakeholders

As noted above, there is a tendency within stakeholder theory to assume an apriori set of stakeholders who may always be considered primary or key stakeholders, regardless of the context (Colvin et al., 2015). However, this assumption has begun to be questioned in stakeholder theory discourse particularly in relation to classification and salience. The concept of marginalisation and silent stakeholders has emerged as a growing area of interest. In particular, this topic explores the ethical implications of how traditional salience models and theories marginalize and routinely ignore certain groups. The concept of marginal stakeholdership emphasises the need to reconsider who is recognized as a legitimate stakeholder within stakeholder theory, and critiques traditional frameworks that prioritize powerful stakeholders, which thus marginalise the interests of those who do not possess a powerful combination of salience attributes (Derry, 2012) Many have argued that existing stakeholder models, particularly the one proposed by Mitchell et al. (1997), reinforce corporate power dynamics and neglect the voices of marginalized groups, which can lead to their further disenfranchisement (Derry, 2012).

Arguments for the recognition of marginalized stakeholders often draw on political, ethical, and sociological interpretations of stakeholder theory, arguing for a more holistic understanding of the theory and its context of power dynamics and social constructivism. The concept of nonhuman stakeholders is closely tied with the concepts of silent and marginal stakeholders, which, while not as popular as other subjects in stakeholder theory, still maintains a sizable research corpus as compared to that of nonhuman stakeholdership. Silent stakeholders are a kind of marginal stakeholder in that they are not able to make their interests heard or known through traditional means (Zuro, 2024). These concepts are in a way inextricable, mainly due to the fact that nonhuman actors – in particular natural nonhuman actors like animals or trees – do not use language in the way humans do. This issue of semiotics points to a larger issue in stakeholder theory of concepts of engaging with actors who cannot exert their agency or will in the same way other (typically human) actors can, leading to tensions of power and legitimacy that managers need to balance when identifying and engaging with stakeholders. These typically less powerful, 'legitimate', and often times proximal stakeholders can thus be categorized as 'marginal' stakeholders. While power has traditionally been considered a dominant factor in stakeholder salience, other attributes may be more relevant for identi-

ifying marginal stakeholders ((Khurram et al., 2020). As noted earlier, Driscoll and Starik (2004) offered a framework incorporating physical proximity as a fourth attribute. This attribute was offered a means to better identify and engage vulnerable or marginal stakeholders (Neville et al., 2011; Shafique & Gabriel, 2022). This expanded model addresses the limitations of focusing solely on high-power stakeholders and provides a more comprehensive approach to stakeholder identification and engagement.

2.4 Non-Humans as Stakeholders

The main topic of this research is the conception of nonhuman stakeholders within academia, as observed through its discussion in journal articles, books, conference papers, and dissertations. As described earlier, there is already a great amount of contestation within the Stakeholder theory pertaining stakeholder theory itself (Miles, 2012). Since it is already difficult for scholars to come to a consensus when it pertains to the more ‘narrow’ category of humans, it is unsurprising that expanding this category to nonhumans – and the subsequent ethical and theoretical implications of this – make theory much more complex and ambiguous.

This ambiguity however is a motivation for this study, since, as with any emerging stream of research, it is important to take note of how much – or little – is understood about the topic. Its prevalence stakeholder theory is sparse in comparison to the substantial body of works that pertain to stakeholder theory. This is evidenced both by basic searches, advanced searches in scientific databases, through this study, and via the previous observations of other scholars who have investigated the concept, notably:

“The environment as a stakeholder is not widely recognised”

(Onkila, 2011)

“Attempts to identify the interests of nature have been scarce since Starik (1995) “

(Kortetmäki et al., 2023)

“Stakeholder theory is anthropocentric; it is a human-focused theory connected to corporate interests.”

(Merskin, 2021)

“little attention has been given to the role of non-human stakeholders”

(Beck & Ferasso, 2023)

“the focus on non-human stakeholders remains limited in business literature and practice.”

(Kopnina et al., 2024a)

As evidenced by the excerpts above, there remains a substantial and observable research gap in literature and practice on the concept of NH stakeholders. It is thus important to better understand the argumentation for and against the conception of NH stakeholders in literature, and what themes, theories, research traditions, and other factors contribute to and co-occur with these conceptions. This review, due to its scoping and exploratory nature, does not discriminate in search or refinement of which type of nonhuman is described in the literature. This means that ‘nonhuman’ may be understood as nature, the environment, animals, and other entities. While nonhumans in stakeholder theory may occasionally be referred to as “other than human”, “more than human”, (Yoo et al., 2023) or “Gaia” (Waddock, 2011), this language is rare and often still accompanied by the more commonly used terms stated above (as is the case with Waddock, 2011). Thus, the search terminology for what ‘nonhuman’ in this review, without conducting a formal corpus linguistics analysis, was limited to the apriori set: “nature, environment, animal, nonhuman” and all their subsequent lemmatized forms. This is discussed in more detail in the methodology section.

Based on the above discussion on stakeholder theory, variants and classifications, nonhuman stakeholdership may ultimately be a question of: identification; salience; and conceptions on the purpose stakeholder theory (re; instrumental, normative, descriptive). This is thus how the topic is approached in this review

3 METHODOLOGY

The following section outlines the methodology used in this review, in this case the scoping review methodology. The general methodological tradition of literature reviews is discussed, leading up to the description, uses, and justification of the scoping review methodology for this research.

3.1 Literature Reviews

The primary purpose of a literature review is to provide a comprehensive summary of existing research on a specific topic, which helps to identify gaps, synthesize findings, and establish a framework for future studies. Literature reviews serve multiple goals, including linking a study to ongoing conversations in the literature, providing background information, and evaluating the importance of the research topic (Amjad et al., 2023). Within the research tradition of the literature review, there are many varying typologies, which are typically categorised between one of two approaches: traditional literature reviews, and systematic literature reviews.

Traditional literature reviews (TLRs) are narrative-based approaches that summarize research on a topic without adhering to the strict methodologies of systematic reviews. They are particularly useful when flexibility in scope is required, often synthesizing both qualitative and quantitative studies to address exploratory questions (Rozas & Klein, 2010). They are however, typically based on selected sources and may focus on studies familiar to the reviewer. Thus, TLRs may be more susceptible to biases such as publication bias and selection bias (Haddaway, Woodcock, et al., 2015). These limitations can affect the reliability of Traditional literature reviews findings. To enhance their credibility, traditional literature reviews can incorporate systematic elements, such as transparent selection criteria and critical appraisal of evidence (Chinn, 2021).

Systematic literature reviews are increasingly favoured over traditional reviews due to their rigorous methodology, which aims to maximize transparency, objectivity, and repeatability (Haddaway et al., 2015). A systematic review is a type of research synthesis that employs explicit, standardized methods to identify, evaluate, and synthesize evidence, minimizing bias and ensuring reliable findings (Xiao & Watson, 2019). Systematic reviews often address specific, well-defined questions and follow established guidelines, such as those provided by the Cochrane Collaboration and PRISMA, to ensure methodological rigor (Pati & Lorusso, 2018). The SLR approach is particularly beneficial for synthesizing diverse evidence and ensuring comprehensive coverage, which is crucial for informed decision-making in complex fields. SLRs are highly advantageous in management studies and multidisciplinary fields because they can integrate a wide range of evidence and reveal gaps in knowledge, although they require significant resources (Haddaway et al., 2015). Despite SLRs being favoured over traditional literature reviews (TLRs), TLRs remain valuable in certain contexts, particularly when SLRs are not feasible (Haddaway et al., 2015). In such cases, incorporating systematic elements into traditional reviews or adopting hybrid approaches can balance methodological rigor with practical research constraints, to ensure reliable and actionable insights (Haddaway et al., 2015; Munn et al., 2018).

In light of this, this study employs a scoping review methodology to systematically explore the literature on nonhuman stakeholders in business and management literature. The scoping review, detailed below, while typically understood as a kind of systematic literature review, offers more flexibility, akin to a traditional literature review, than typical SLRs (Xiao and Watson, 2019). This approach is particularly appropriate for an emerging research area where evidence spans multiple disciplines and demonstrates significant diversity.

3.2 Scoping reviews

Scoping reviews, as a typology within descriptive systematic literature reviews, aim to comprehensively map existing literature on a specific topic, identify key concepts, clarify definitions, and highlight research gaps (Munn et al., 2018). Unlike other types of systematic literature reviews, scoping reviews do not critically appraise the quality of evidence or attempt to synthesize results quantitatively. Instead, they provide an overview of the breadth and depth of available research, making them particularly useful for emerging topics or areas with fragmented evidence bases (Munn et al., 2018).

A Scoping review's primary objective is to capture the current state of the literature rather than to expand upon it, test specific hypotheses, or critique existing findings (Xiao & Watson, 2019). Scoping reviews are especially suited for addressing broad research questions that assess the conceptual boundaries of a field, the types of evidence available, and the scope of research activity (Munn

et al., 2018). Widely regarded as an effective method for rapidly evaluating evidence in emerging fields, scoping reviews provide a valuable tool for researchers to identify and analyse knowledge gaps (Munn et al., 2018). By clarifying key concepts and identifying underexplored areas, scoping reviews offer a robust foundation for future research directions (Pollock et al., 2022). By mapping the literature, this review identifies key theories, highlights gaps in research, and provides a basis for future studies.

By using a this approach, this study integrates descriptive typologies with systematic evidence mapping to identify theoretical contributions and gaps in stakeholder theory, as suggested by (Xiao and Watson, 2019).

3.3 Approach

Recent advancements in scoping review methodology emphasize iterative search strategies and transparent reporting as critical components for ensuring rigor and reliability (Peters et al., 2020). In order to conduct a scoping review according to recommended best practices, several tools were employed. Firstly, the scope and context were identified using the Population, Concept, and Context (PCC) framework. Once a basic Apriori set of criteria was defined based on this, the systematic search, screening, and selection process was conducted according to the the PRISMA-ScR (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews) guidelines. These guidelines enhance transparency and reproducibility by providing structured documentation for search strategies, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and study selection processes (Peters et al., 2020). The review process is visually represented through a PRISMA flow diagram, which illustrates the identification, screening, and inclusion stages.

This study followed the recommendation of an iterative approach by refining search terms and inclusion criteria throughout the review process, which ensured alignment with the research objectives. Iterative adjustments were essential for accommodating the interdisciplinary nature of the literature on nonhuman stakeholders in business and management.

3.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

As noted above, a recommended tool for scoping reviews involved employing the PCC framework to define the scope (Peters et al., 2020). For this research, the population focuses on nonhuman stakeholders, including animals, nature, and the environment. The concept centres on stakeholdership, specifically theoretical arguments for or against granting stakeholder status to nonhumans. The context includes academic reports, which includes journal articles, book chapters, doctoral dissertations, and conference papers (provided they were availa-

ble in English). Once the scope was established, the development of inclusion and exclusion criteria followed an iterative process to ensure consistency and relevance throughout the study. The criteria were refined based on the availability of evidence and alignment with the study objectives, guided by the Population, Concept, and Context (PCC) framework (Peters et al., 2020). The inclusion criteria focused on studies specifically addressing stakeholder status and nonhuman stakeholders, with the use of key terms such as "nonhuman", "nature", "environment", or "animals as stakeholders".

The exclusion criteria eliminated studies that lacked theoretical arguments for or against nonhuman stakeholders, empirical studies without theoretical backing, and papers that mentioned nonhuman entities without engaging with stakeholder theory. These exclusions ensured that the review maintained a focus on theoretical debates about nonhuman stakeholdership.

The final Selection Criteria is detailed in [Table 2](#).

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Academic works addressing stakeholder legitimacy and nonhuman stakeholders.	Studies lacking theoretical arguments for or against nonhuman stakeholdership
Keywords: "nonhuman," "nature," "environment," or "animals."	Empirical studies without theoretical backing in Stakeholder Discourse
Sources: Journal articles, book chapters, conference papers, and dissertations	Papers mentioning nonhuman entities without engaging with stakeholder theory.
Language: English	

Table 1: Final Selection Criteria

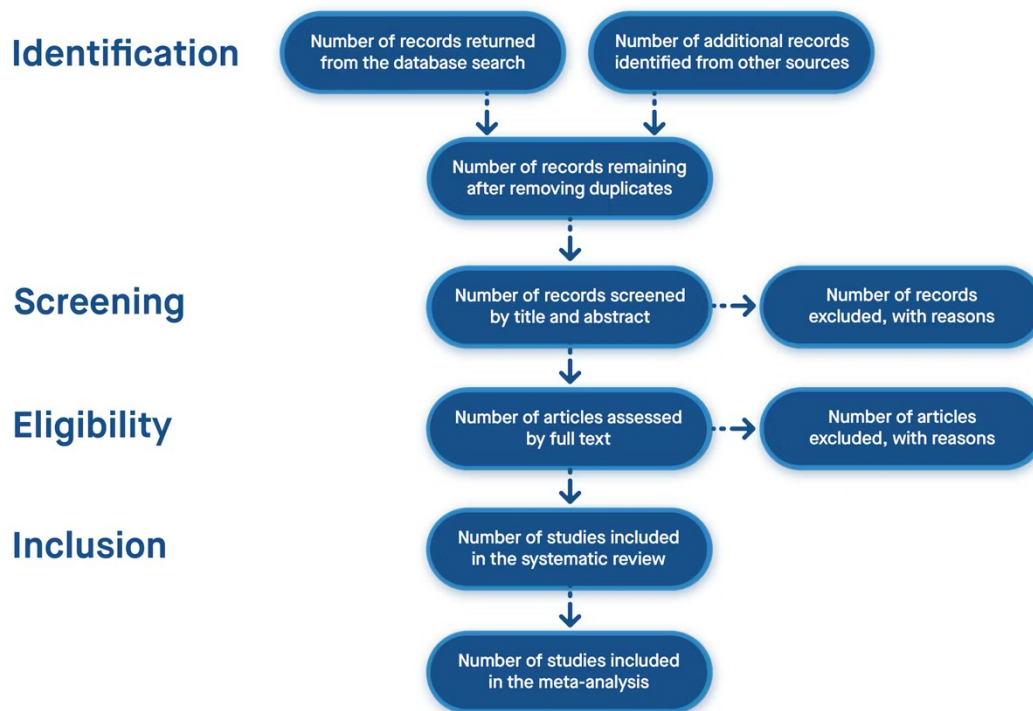


Figure 2: Example of a PRISMA flow diagram for conducting a systematic literature review (from Nalen, 2024)

[Figure 2](#) offers a visual guide on how the PRISMA process should proceed. In order to apply the criteria according to PRISMA 2020 guidelines, the screening process was conducted in three stages: title, abstract, and full-text review. Only fitting the Selection Criteria detailed in Table 2 were retained for analysis. Papers with peripheral mentions of nonhuman stakeholders, without deeper theoretical engagement, were excluded. This can be seen in the [PRISMA Flow chart](#).

3.4 Search Procedures

In accordance with the PRISMA guidelines for a scoping review, the search and screening process was done systematically to ensure rigour and transparency. Based on the PCC framework, a systematic search was conducted using Web of Science (WOS) Core Collection and Google Scholar. These databases were selected for their comprehensive coverage and relevance to the research topic,

with tailored search strategies applied to each platform. In order to manage and systematically screen the records identified, the reference software Zotero was used, where records were siphoned off into further refined categories once they had been screened at each stage. These collections of records were organized into Zotero based on which database they originated from, which stage of screening they fit into, and if they were identified via citation analysis or systematic search.

The following subsections outline the Search strategy for each respective database, as well as the addition of Citation Analysis to complement the depth of the sample.

3.4.1 Web of Science Core Collection

The Web of Science search utilized advanced search Boolean operators and keyword variations to capture the full breadth of nonhuman stakeholder terminology. The query terms included exact phrases such as “nonhuman stakeholder” and variations like “animal stakeholders” or “nature as a stakeholder.” Topic searches (TS=) were employed to target titles, abstracts, and keywords, ensuring inclusion of relevant studies while filtering out irrelevant results.

To address the variability in terminology, detruncated terms such as "non" and "human" were combined. Exact matches were enforced using quotation marks, which ensured only precise phrases, like “nonhuman stakeholder,” were retrieved. This strategy reduced ambiguity and improved the relevance of the results. This is important when using advanced search tools, since, as in WOS, an implicit AND operator is present in all search queries outside of quotation marks. This means that if one simply searches *nonhuman stakeholders* outside of quotations, results yield all sources which use one or both terms, but not necessarily the terms in conjunction. Using this tool introduced some challenges, mainly related to balancing comprehensiveness with specificity, as broader searches yield unrelated results. The detailed search configuration is provided in Appendix 1. Overall, the final search query provided 41 results which were then screened and refined according to the PRISMA-ScR protocol.

3.4.2 Google Scholar

Google Scholar is a widely known and used tool for preliminary systematic searches in academia (Haddaway, Collins, et al., 2015). However, using the basic search tool instead of the advanced search tool will provide the researcher with millions of results. Indeed, *nonhuman stakeholders* as a basic search yields 4,900,000 results. Google Scholar’s extensive and largely un-curated database poses some challenges, including duplicate records and extensive irrelevant results. This is a limitation compared to other databases, which allows the user

to screen for relevance based on title and abstract, versus the entire text. To mitigate these challenges, only the first 200 results for broad queries were screened, as recommended by (Haddaway, Collins, et al., 2015). Duplicates across queries were systematically identified and excluded to ensure a manageable dataset. Detailed search queries and inclusion parameters for Google Scholar are available in Appendix 1.

As noted above, (Haddaway, Collins, et al., 2015) recommend that only the first few hundred results in a google scholar search will be reliably relevant to the research aim. Thus, only the first 200 results of the large yield searches (namely search queries 6 & 7) were then screened, as they are automatically presented based on relevance by the database.

The final number then screened was 936. However, among these 936 results were likely hundreds of duplicates. This is because the difference between search terms was minute, and just from a brief comparison, it could be shown that the 13 papers which were found in search query 3, were also present in search query 4, which yielded 153 results. Thus, search query 4 only yielded 140 *new* results, when compared to search query 3. This means that the numbers of results presented are not all unique or new additions, but likely collections of results which coincide with other similar search queries. It was not possible to systematically determine the number of duplicates, due to the exporting limitations of Google Scholar. Thus, the approach was to screen each list (with an upper limit of 200 results) and collect a list which fit the criteria based on abstract and title alone. While screening for each search query, the first few pages of results became increasingly filled with papers identified from previous search query screenings. This meant that by search query 8, the first 200 results were almost all already preidentified by the screening done in search queries 1-7. Because of this, while the results show 936 records were screened, likely only 200-300 unique results were actually investigated, since the majority seemed to be duplicates. Resulting from this screening process, 168 papers total were collected for further screening of the full text.

3.4.2 Snowballing Approach

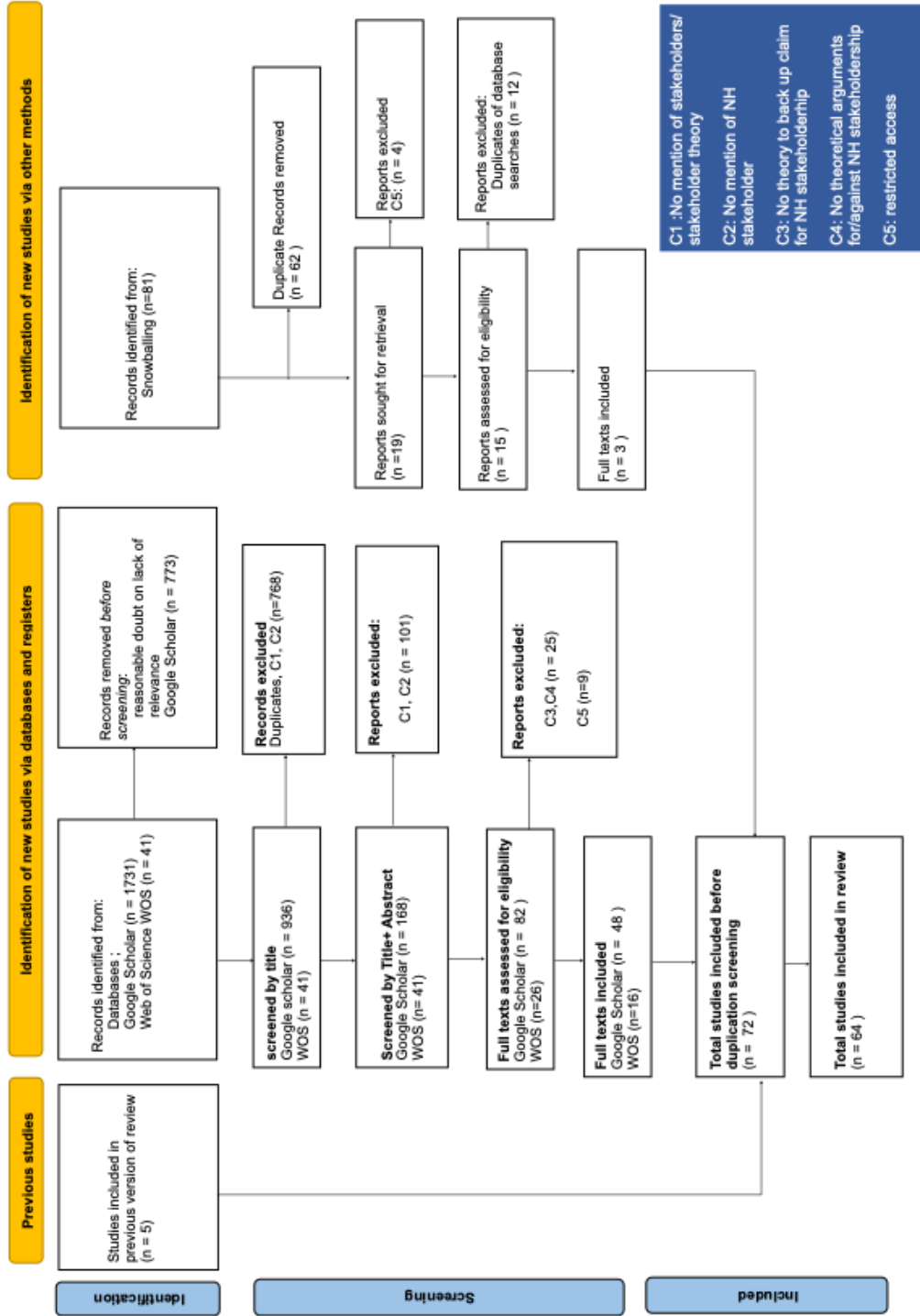
The snowballing approach – also known as backwards or forwards citation analysis -- enhances the comprehensiveness of scoping reviews, especially for emerging or interdisciplinary topics. This method involves reviewing reference lists of included studies (backward citation tracking) and identifying subsequent citations (forward citation tracking) to uncover additional relevant literature that might be missed during initial database searches (Mak & Martin, 2020; Peters et al., 2020). Forward and backward citation tracking are to enhance literature reviews by identifying foundational and overlooked works (Mak et al., 2021). By integrating this approach, the study minimized the risk of omitting relevant evidence and improved the efficiency of the review process.

In this study, a systematic and iterative snowballing framework was applied. Backward citation analysis reviewed references cited in key studies identified through database searches to map foundational works (Peters et al., 2020). For-

ward citation analysis employed the citation tracking tool LitMaps, which identified related studies based on shared citations, references, or content similarity (Haddaway, Woodcock, et al., 2015; Mak & Thomas, 2022). The records found throughout this process were screened using the same criteria as those identified in the databases. These techniques expanded the dataset while ensuring alignment with the research question, enriching the review with works central to theoretical debates on nonhuman stakeholders (Haddaway et al., 2015).

Aligned with the PCC framework and further refined selection criteria (Peters et al., 2020), this approach prioritized theoretical contributions. To maintain focus, only studies with substantial theoretical engagement were pursued further, which minimized the inclusion of peripheral or tangential works. As is common in snowballing, the majority of records identified in this process were duplicates, since many source papers used similar approaches – thus evidence --, resulting in some commonly cited papers among the PRISMA identified papers. The snowballing process ensured that the final body of literature offered meaningful insights into the theoretical conceptualization of nonhuman stakeholders in research.

PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for updated systematic reviews which included searches of databases, registers and other sources



3.5 Analysis

In order to analyse the conceptions of nonhuman stakeholderhood, it was necessary to narrow down which aspects of stakeholder theory would be the appropriate lenses with which to read and synthesise the findings. This research's understanding of 'conceptions' of nonhuman stakeholderhood can be described also as looking for what are the arguments for or against this concept, and what conception of stakeholder theory are the authors using to back up this claim? As noted in the [Theoretical Framework](#), Stakeholder theory can be understood in 3 distinct, though interlinked variants; normative, descriptive, and instrumental. While some advocate for their synthesis in 'integrative' stakeholder theory, it remains a fact that in the literature, researchers sometimes favor one variant over the other. Thus, in order to understand conceptions of nonhuman stakeholderhood, it is relevant to understand which variant of stakeholder theory researchers are using to form this conception.

In addition to this, 2 core characteristics had to be recorded; firstly, if the paper argues for or against nonhuman stakeholderhood (or if they remain inconclusive), and secondly, which kind of nonhuman stakeholder is discussed. Both these characteristics directly answer questions of how nonhuman stakeholders are conceived of in literature, as it tells us both the subject and stance of the literature. If these two aspects are not investigated, then it would be very difficult to ascertain what the conception is of the topic of nonhuman stakeholderhood.

As highlighted earlier, a relevant aspect to the conception of stakeholderhood is the notion of primary vs secondary stakeholderhood. This was seen as a relevant aspect in this review, since it can indicate how much legitimate attention a stakeholder group is getting. If a stakeholder group is viewed as Primary, it likely indicates they are given more attention in all institutional settings, including academia. Thus, it is also investigated if nonhuman stakeholders are viewed as primary or secondary stakeholders in the literature.

Besides the relevant aspects grounded in stakeholder theory, other characteristics were recorded, since they are relevant in any scoping review. These included a Brief summary of Key findings, Main themes, Theoretical Frameworks and main theories referenced/used, perceptions of the topic in academia, and suggestions for a research agenda. The terminology used to describe non-human stakeholders—such as nature or the environment—was also recorded. In each paper, it was noted how the authors reflected on the status of non-human stakeholderhood in previous works, discussing whether the topic was regarded as niche, legitimate, emerging, well-researched, or under-researched. If they

pointed to existing research gaps and provided reasons for these gaps, these were also recorded.

All of these considerations have thus been narrowed down into the lens with which the data was synthesised and then disseminated into results in Appendix 2. Another aspect of the synthesis was also the chronology and evolution of the conception. While this is not a historical analysis, it is nonetheless important for both this and future research to place findings in a chronological order, since historical context may later prove to be relevant variables in the conception. The chronology also helps the reader to see how arguments have evolved and been built on top of one another over its progression in the discourse, as is common in academia.

Thus, once all the papers were identified and organized, they were divided into 3 major 'era's across a 29 year period, from 1995-2024. This organization was done not only to fit the chronology requirement, but also to organize the results in a more concise manner, since a single summary of 65 works could be overwhelming and have the potential diminish the relevance of publication date amidst a mass of items. The first 'era' is works published between 1995-2004. This is the 'first' era of selected works. The following (second era) contains works published between 2005-2014, and the last and third contains works published 2015-2024. While there is no systematic division between 'era's per se, this organization allows the opportunity for further research to more easily refer back to the data and potentially gain insights on how each era may differentiate among others based on 10-year periods.

4 FINDINGS

As noted earlier, this study aims to gather, synthesise, and present how non-human stakeholdership has been conceived of in academic discourse. This is approached by gathering the relevant papers which take a stance for or against the concept, or discuss the concept in detail, presenting arguments both for and against the conception.

The following section discusses the findings gained from this process. While the extensive results can be found in the Appendices, they will be summarized in this section and referred to with the assumption that the reader has familiarized themselves with the content in the Appendices.

The Findings will be organized as such; First, some basic bibliographic elements are presented in quantitative formats, including histograms and pie charts. Following this, a qualitative summary of the arguments against nonhuman stakeholdership are presented, with some discussion on the implications of these arguments. Next, the research found in favour nonhuman stakeholdership are presented in a similar manner. Lastly a synthesis of the divergent conceptions is discussed.

4.1 Figures and Bibliometric Data

The Following Data was Collected by translating the final document list from the reference software Zotero into csv format so that it could be analysed using Microsoft Excel. The charts present basic bibliometric data on the sample, including how it has evolved since its original conception in 1995; which kind of scholarly publication is most common; which journals the topic most

frequently appears in; and which kind of stakeholder is most commonly referred to.

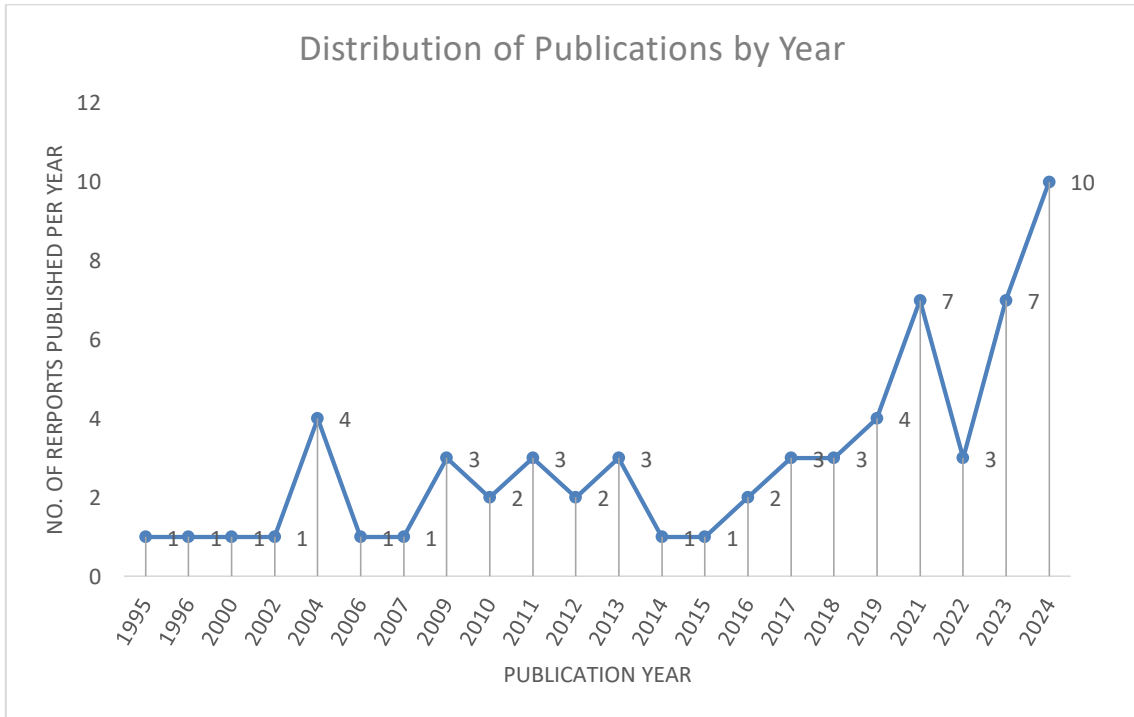


Figure 1: Distribution of Publications by Year

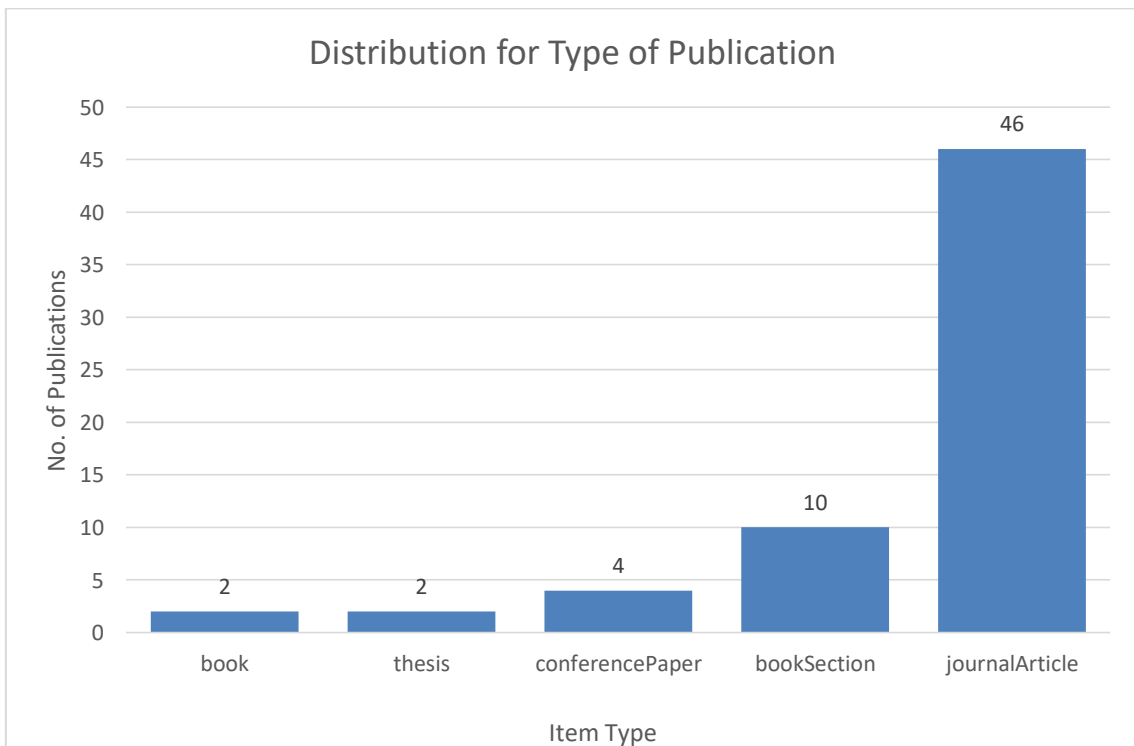


Figure 2: Distribution for Type of Publication

Distribution of Journals for Articles

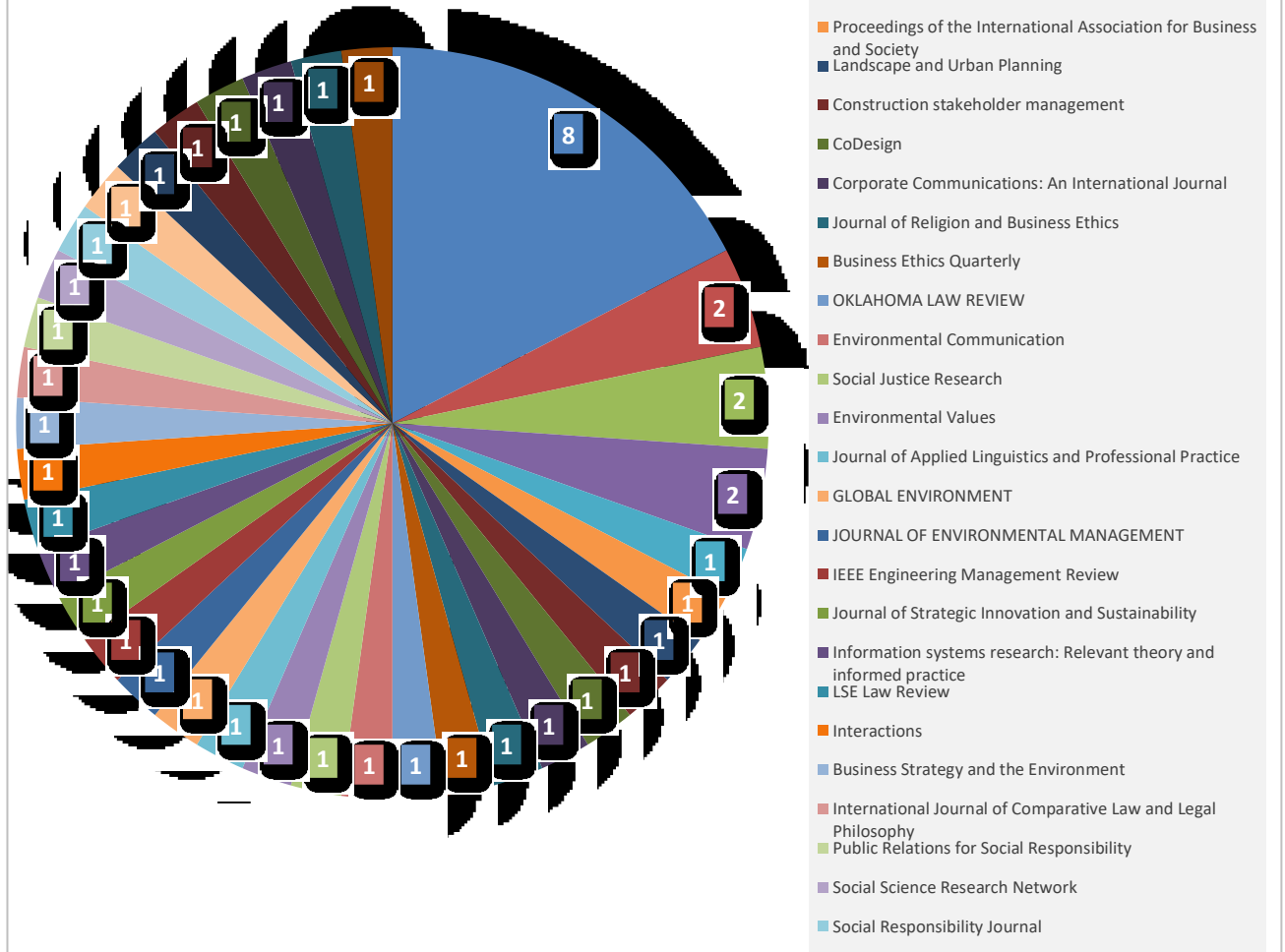


Figure 3

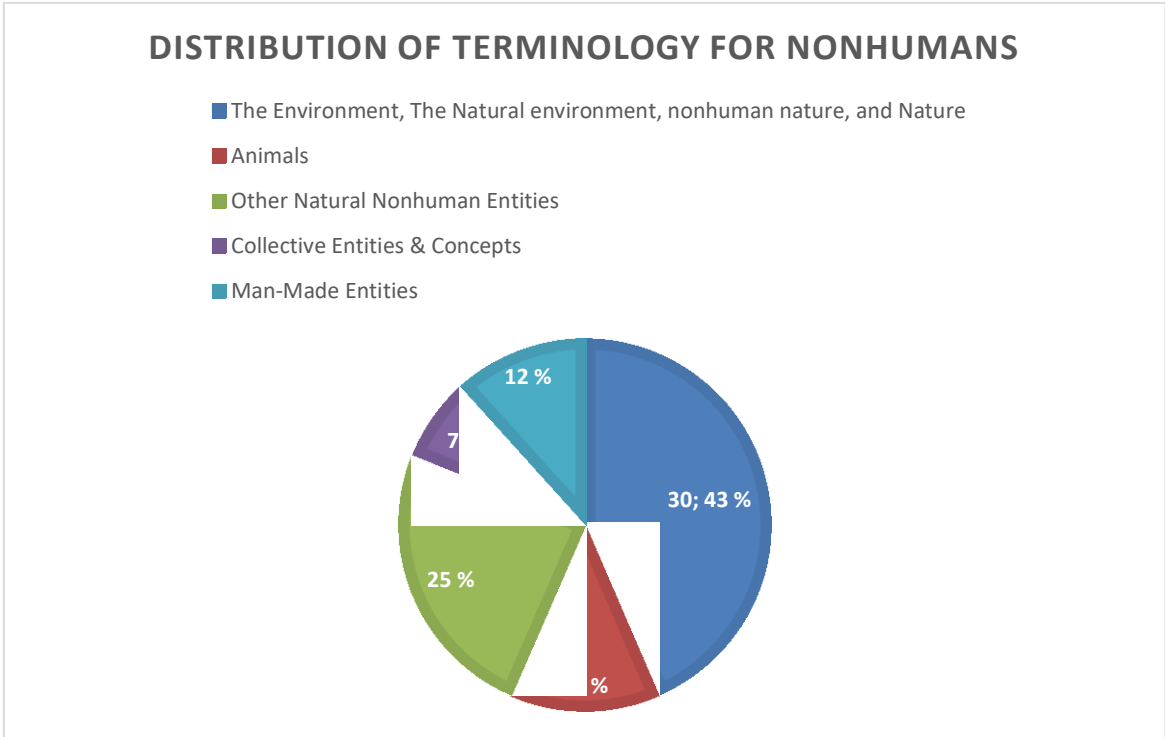


Figure 4

Based on these figures, the several insights about the conceptions of nonhuman stakeholderhood can be drawn. Firstly, it shows that the most common kind of publication is a journal article, which indicates that the concept has gained traction in peer reviewed circles. It is important to note that in figure 3, “thesis” refers to doctoral dissertation, rather than a masters or bachelors thesis. The results also show that for journal articles, the Journal of Business Ethics was the most common publication type, with “Organization & Environment”, “Ecological Economics”, And “sustainability” being the other most popular journals, though by a much smaller margin. The rest of the publications were highly varied, which indicates that a wide range of discipline are involved in this discussion.

Notably, it can be seen from Figure 1 that the concept has grown in popularity over the past 30 years, with a significant increase in popularity between the 2021 and 2024, with 2024 being by far the most prolific year for the subject.

Lastly, [figure 5](#) shows which kind of nonhuman entity has been most discussed in the literature. This data was collected from the tables seen in Appendix 3. Once the data was transformed into CSV format and translated into Microsoft excel, the chart was generated based on the frequency of terms per four relevant categories; The environment (and related terms); Animals; Natural nonhumans (unspecified); Collective entities and concepts; and Man-made entities. The full description on which terms were placed into which category can be seen in the table in Appendix 3. Overall, this data shows that by far, The Environment, nature, and other forms of this terminology are the most common in the literature when non-human stakeholders are discussed. Some more vague

terminology, such as Gaia or ecosystems, were also common, as seen by the category “other natural nonhuman entities”. These authors were specific only in that the relevant nonhuman actor should be a natural one, as opposed to a nonnatural or nonphysical one.

4.2 Qualitative Findings

The following section outlines and discusses the findings based on the theoretical conceptions of nonhuman stakeholderhood, particularly in relation to the theoretical framework, which is largely focused on argumentation and its alignment to each variant of stakeholder theory, as well as the perceptions of the topic in academia, potential research agenda, and if there is a consensus on primary vs Secondary Stakeholderhood.

4.2.1 Arguments Against

As seen by Tables 1,2,3 in Appendix 2, The majority of the papers in this review discovered were those who, if taking a strong stance on the topic, inevitably argue *for* the conception of nonhumans as legitimate stakeholders. Indeed, only 6 of the 65 total papers found took a firm stance against the concept, while 2 took a critical stance but remained somewhat inconclusive about their final take on the matter. Among the 6 papers which argue against including nonhumans as stakeholders, the most common type of argumentation was Descriptive, meaning that they cite the incompatibility of the concept within stakeholder theory, rather than relying on arguments against its ethical or strategic value. However, all types of argumentations are present in these papers with a focus on normative and descriptive.

Among the arguments cited, a normative argument is that “only humans can be stakeholders due to their capacity to generate obligations” (Phillips & Reichart, 2000). Phillips and Reichart, (2000) and (Orts & Strudler, 2002) were among the first and most influential to the critique idea of the environment as a stakeholder – as proposed by Starik in 1995. These authors use a combination of normative and descriptive argumentation, (Phillips and Reichardt, 2000) focusing on an absence of moral reciprocity and the lack of an economic relationship between the environment and the organization. In addition, they cite the descriptive argument that, to them, nonhumans possess a lack of identifiable interests (Orts and Strudler, 2002). In their view, this is a strong ethical and theoretical basis with which to disqualify the environment as a legitimate stakeholder. In-

deed, if the understanding of stakeholderhood is that it requires traditional agency, clearly articulated and identifiable interests, and moral and economic reciprocity, then it is understandable that these authors would assume the matter to be closed; stakeholder theory is legitimate only as human-only concept. Following works critiquing nonhuman stakeholderhood support this argumentation, adding support to the notion that the non-humans' (perceived) lack of agency disqualifies them from stakeholder status. While in favour of nonhuman stakeholder status, even (Lassen, 2013) notes that this is an issue in the theory, highlighting that complexities of non-human agency have not been adequately explored (Lassen, 2013). In addition, (Dandy & Porth, 2021) highlight concerns about the complexity and potential dilution of the stakeholder concept if it is broadened to include nonhuman entities. This concept of *Dilution* is a popular descriptive and instrumental argument among the critics, who argue that stakeholder theory loses its prescriptive power as a popular theory in business ethics when the wide definition is used.

However, more recent papers which critique nonhuman stakeholderhood have tended to move away from anthropocentric arguments. These papers, such as by (Barter, 2011; Laine, 2010) switch the discourse from nonhumans being insufficient in a stakeholder theory context, to the inverse, where stakeholder theory is seen as insufficient in capturing the complexity, ambiguities, and intrinsic values of natural nonhuman stakeholders, most often referring to the environment or nature. Even papers supportive of nonhuman nature's stakeholder status often criticise stakeholder theory for its somewhat static and rigid view of systems and stakeholder interactions, often advocating for more complex views of stakeholder networks by using Actor Network Theory (ANT) to supplement stakeholder theory. Regardless, while these papers may have a more respectful and less dismissive view of nature, they conclude nevertheless that stakeholder theory is the wrong framework to use for including nonhumans in organizational management. Even papers which explicitly argue for the inclusion of nonhuman stakeholders note the theoretical ambiguities of stakeholder definitions make the topic a contentious and difficult one. While some papers recognize the moral legitimacy of nonhuman nature as stakeholders, they argue that the ambiguity of the concept overrides any potential benefits that may be gained from including them in stakeholder networks (Barter, 2011; Laine, 2010; Lischinsky, 2015).

As noted above, some scholars are critical of the stakeholderhood of, in particular, the environment, due to stakeholder theory's inability to sufficiently capture the complexity of ecological systems. Arguments in this strain have argued that the Stakeholder categorization of nature does not provide a clear framework for understanding the environment's role in stakeholder theory; nor does it appreciate the complexities of ecological systems (Hammond & Booth, 2009). This has led to more arguments surrounding the complexities of defining and measuring Environment's needs. Not just framed as a problem for managers – as was done by Orts and Strudler (2002) – this issue of communication is argued to lead to disenfranchisement of less scientifically-capable stakeholders.

In reference to the environment, Laine (2010) in particular argues that the lack of consensus on terminology leads to serious issues of ambiguity, thus advocating the need for clearer conceptual distinctions. Even 13 years later, it is noted by (Kortetmäki et al., 2023) that there is an issue with previous works often treating nonhuman nature in generic terms, which limits the understanding of its specific characteristics and needs (Kortetmäki et al., 2023). This shows that terminology and semantics have been of growing interest and import in the research, where it was not previously considered an issue in the first era of scholarly debate (re; 1995-2004). The concept of particularization is especially crucial in this case to mitigate this issue (Kortetmäki et al., 2023)

From the arguments against, the issue of semiotics has become more common (Lukasiewicz et al., 2013); there is an emphasized need for clarity in defining environmental needs, the challenges of representation in decision-making, and the tension between economic and environmental priorities.

According to (Lukasiewicz et al 2013) The environment suffers from a "crisis of identity," as various stakeholders claim to represent it but often express conflicting needs.

Critics of the environment as a stakeholder concept argue based on instrumental and descriptive arguments and emphasise the challenges of quantifying environmental impacts and the complexities of integrating non-human interests into traditional business frameworks (Gutterman, 2023). (Stober, 2014) argues that this Complexity and difficulty in measuring impacts towards this stakeholder group may deter organizations from fully integrating nature-centred perspectives into their strategic planning.

Empirical findings indicate that while the environment is frequently mentioned, it lacks the agency and active engagement typically associated with human stakeholders, suggesting a superficial acknowledgment of its status as a stakeholder (Lischinsky 2015); Lischinsky's (2015) findings show that the environment is often discussed in passive terms, primarily as an object of the organisation's actions rather than as an active participant with demands.

(Blount & Conklin, 2023) note that while stakeholder theory has gained popularity, particularly in corporate governance, there remains significant confusion regarding who qualifies as a stakeholder, which becomes compounded when it comes to non-human entities. The authors highlight that the broad and imprecise definitions within stakeholder theory contribute to its impracticality, suggesting that the theory has become convoluted and inconsistent, which complicates its application in real-world scenarios. They also add that the subjective nature of measuring stakeholder interests and the difficulties in balancing these interests across diverse groups exacerbate the challenges in this area of research. This can be supported empirically by the work done by Lischinsky (2015), Though others, such as (Tryggstad et al., 2013) have found that including nonhuman stakeholders can be done empirically and actual offer valuable and actionable insights to managers and organizations (Tryggstad et al.,2013). This contention on the actionability of

nonhuman-inclusive stakeholder theory in management contexts further highlights the call by researchers for more empirical research on the subject. Of the critical arguments presented, the most common nonhuman stakeholder referenced is the environment, with other terminology used such as “the natural environment” and “nature” (see figure 5). However, unlike the arguments for inclusion, arguments against nonhuman stakeholdership tend to be broader in who is considered a nonhuman stakeholder, perhaps relying on the term’s inherent ambiguity to bolster arguments that *nonhuman-ness* can be the basis to disqualify stakeholder status, rather than any particular quality a nonhuman may possess. Based on the state of the topic in current research, it is clear that there is a lack of consensus on which nonhuman stakeholder should be disqualified from gaining stakeholder status. While many of the papers use the broad term ‘nonhuman stakeholders’ to begin with, they inevitably end up arguing against one particular kind of entity. In this case, the entity is most often the environment, nature, or some other form of this concept. There have yet to be any papers on the topic which argue specifically against animals as stakeholders, or other nonhuman entities imagined, such as God, Technology, or Artificial Intelligence. This is a clear weakness in this strain of research, since it assumes all nonhuman entities may be disqualified on the same bases. However, it can be seen in the arguments *for* nonhuman stakeholdership, that the particularization of each nonhuman stakeholder is a crucial aspect determining its salience and legitimacy as a stakeholder in a given context. From the evidence collected for this scoping review, it can be surmised that authors who write on the subject have tended to think of nonhuman and the environment as analogous, perhaps because this particular conception of nonhuman stakeholder is both the original (i.e. Starik’s 1995 seminal work) and most common nonhuman stakeholder imagined in research.

In summary, the main Instrumental and Descriptive arguments against nonhuman stakeholdership include the following: The concept lacks prescriptive power, as ambiguities make the theory inoperable and confusing for managers and practitioners. In addition, the prospect of ecological semiotics means that engaging with silent stakeholders may be difficult and laborious, thus reducing the advantage stakeholder theory offers as a relatively simple and effective heuristic for managers and practitioners. The main normative arguments presented agree that under the traditional view of agency, nonhuman stakeholders lack the ability to morally and economically reciprocate, thus under Rawlsian fairness principles, it is unethical to give them equal consideration to stakeholders who are able to reciprocate, or who have clearly identifiable interests and the capability to voice those interests.

4.3 Arguments In Favour

The inclusion of non-human stakeholders has gained traction in particular as means of enhancing sustainability and influencing project outcomes (Tryggstad

et al., 2013). Among the research in favour of nonhuman stakeholderhood, there is a growing recognition of non-human agency, which was originally considered to be a main theoretical disqualification for nonhuman entities gaining stakeholder status (Smart, 2022). Agency, when viewed through new materialist lenses, can be understood as a continuum rather than a binary construct (Lassen, 2013). In addition (Tryggstad et al., 2013) argue that "non-human stakeholders can gain agency and influence project outcomes, thereby supporting the inclusion of non-human entities in stakeholder discussions." (Varner, 2016) extends this discussion in their doctoral dissertation, dismantling the argument that nonhuman stakeholders must be ignored due to a lack of shared language. She emphasizes that understanding the needs of and thus engaging with non-humans is possible despite linguistic barriers, drawing on Dewey's concept of language, with "the concept of language extends well beyond linguistic practices alone, so linguistic barriers, while certainly complicated, do not prevent the possibility of rich communication across difference or even across species" (Varner, 2016). The increasing prevalence of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) in the literature arguing for nonhuman stakeholderhood reflects an emerging response to the agency problem in stakeholder theory.

In relation to agency and stakeholder communication, some authors have argued that a lack of traditional agency or communication should not disqualify a group from stakeholder status. (Connolly & Cullen, 2018) argue that the inability to voice claims should not infer a lack of legitimacy, echoing Starik's (1995) assertion that many minorities and vulnerable humans are without such voice as well. Smart (2022) in particular is critical of the agency requirement in stakeholder definitions. He claims this condition imposes a requirement that only those who can intentionally participate in a relationship can be considered stakeholders. This condition is seen as problematic because it excludes many entities, including non-human animals, that have moral relevance but lack the capacity for intentional participation. Smart argues that this perspective is too narrow and does not account for the ethical obligations businesses have toward those who cannot express their interests in the same way humans do. Furthermore, the critique highlights that the Agency Condition relies on a notion of power that is not universally applicable, as many stakeholders, such as employees or children, may lack power yet still hold stakeholder status. Smart thus emphasizes that ethical Stakeholder Theory should provide a framework that recognizes the moral interests of *all* relevant parties, regardless of their ability to impose their will or participate intentionally. Rejecting a speciesist lens, Smart thus is able to logically confer full stakeholder status onto participating animals, though notably under the conception of normative stakeholder theory. Regardless, this refutation of the agency condition will likely be useful for further researchers who wish to explore how animals can gain legitimacy as stakeholders in organizational contexts.

(Schwartz, 2006) in particular highlights the descriptive aspect of stakeholder theory, and bases his argument on this conception of the theory and its intended purposes. Basing his argument on the seminal work done by Mitchell et al.

(1997), Schwartz (2006) notes that stakeholder attributes are socially constructed, suggesting that "stakeholder attributes are socially constructed, not objective reality," and that managers' perceptions of these groups are more critical than their 'objective; legitimacy. Thus, descriptive conceptions of stakeholder theory have been suited particularly directed more abstract concepts as stakeholders, such as God (Schwartz, 2006) or IT Systems (Vidgen & McMaster, 1996). These papers reiterate the idea that stakeholder theory should be grounded more in how various systems interact with the organization in question, rather than some objective and positivist reality where there is a predetermined set of 'true' stakeholders.

Others have argued with instrumentalist conceptions of stakeholder theory, noting that conferring stakeholder status on the natural environment offers a more holistic approach to stakeholder management, potentially leading to "win-win" scenarios that benefit both organizations and the natural environment (Gauthier, 2018). Indeed, several authors note that Empirical evidence supports the positive relationship between stakeholder management, including non-human stakeholders, and financial performance. (Jackson, 2021) notes that Sustainable practices can lead to long-term benefits for businesses, such as improved reputation and compliance with emerging regulations. Authors in favour of recognizing the natural environment as a stakeholder note that this can also lead to strategic advantages, such as reducing risks associated with natural disasters and enhancing long-term sustainability (Antunes et al., 2024). This aligns with the assertions of Hart and Sharma (2004), who argue that "including fringe stakeholders can provide competitive advantages"(Hart and Sharma, 2004).

Also a more instrumental argument, it is becoming increasingly popular for the research to emphasize that recognising the environment as a stakeholder and considering non-human needs helps avoid negative consequences for both ecosystems and human communities ((Gordon & Roudavski, 2021; Haigh & Griffiths, 2009) One of the most common themes among these papers is the emphasis on the interconnectedness between human and nonhuman life, further emphasizing the need to consider nonhuman interests, both as a recognition of their intrinsic value, but also as a pragmatic approach to human crises, such as climate change (Haigh & Griffiths, 2009).

A distinct difference between the arguments for vs against nonhuman stakeholdership is the emergence of Animals as stakeholders becoming increasingly considered in the Literature. Notably, (Kenehan, 2019) categorizes research animals as stakeholders in businesses engaged in animal experimentation or testing, arguing that this group fits both broad and narrow definitions of stakeholder status: "by definition, research animals can be categorized as stakeholders in businesses that engage in animal experimentation or testing." Others, such as Smart (2022), and (Tallberg et al., 2022), offer further arguments as to why animals can easily be considered legitimate stakeholders based on stakeholder theory principles and salience models, despite their systemic exclusion

as stakeholders in the mainstream discourse. In particular, animals in the tourism industry is a topic popular in this conception of animals as stakeholders. (Veselova, 2023; Veselova & Gaziulusoy, 2021) argue that theories that predominantly recognize only human or human-made entities as stakeholders limit the understanding of ecological systems and sustainability. In addition (Gutterman, 2023) argues that responsible businesses have obligations to proactively reduce adverse environmental impacts throughout the life cycle of their products, highlighting the central role of the environment in corporate decision-making. Among the arguments in Favor of granting nonhumans stakeholder status, the primary mode of argumentation was normative (see Appendix 2). Upon reflection of the kinds of nonhumans conceptualised, this is unsurprising. This is because, overwhelmingly, the kind of nonhuman conceptualized was some form of nonhuman nature, where the impetus for the stakeholdership argumentation stemmed from environmental ethics or other theories of justice and care for nonhuman nature.

4.4 Primary Vs Secondary Stakeholdership

Many authors did not explicitly use the terms of primary or secondary to conceptualize nonhumans and their status as stakeholders. This study had to thus infer, based on the definition of primary vs secondary stakeholdership, which class the authors seemed to conceptualize the nonhuman stakeholder into. Overall, and in particular only for those who argued *for* a non-human group gaining stakeholder status, the arguments were for the aforementioned group being a primary stakeholder. This is somewhat unsurprising, considering the data selected for this study only included works which took a more definitive stance on the subject, which generally meant the author perceived the stakeholdership of the nonhuman group in question to be of a primary concern, rather than as a lesser one. Based on the results, there is no observable trend on the consensus of primary vs secondary stakeholdership based on the years published, meaning that this conception has not evolved over the past 30 years.

4.5 Attitudes and Research Agenda

The following section, divided into the 3 'eras', details how the topic of nonhuman stakeholdership has been perceived – according to the papers collected for this review – in terms of the scholarly attention and attitudes it has garnered at the time of publication. In addition, this section reviews the noted

research gaps, as well as offering a summary of the recommended research agenda.

4.5.1.1 Era 1: 1995-2004

Based on the reports collected for the first era, the topic of non-human stakeholders at the time is perceived as niche and under-researched within academic discourse, with significant gaps identified in the literature regarding their inclusion in stakeholder theory. Many of these papers argue that traditional stakeholder frameworks have largely overlooked the natural environment, focusing instead on economic, political, sociocultural, and technological factors, which has led to a limited understanding of the complexities involved in stakeholder relationships that include non-human entities. This anthropocentric bias in management theory has contributed to the marginalization of the natural environment as a legitimate stakeholder, resulting in a lack of recognition of its intrinsic worth and the ethical implications of its exclusion (Driscoll and Starik, 2004). The authors contend that the existing literature fails to adequately address the moral significance of non-human stakeholders, suggesting that the topic warrants further exploration to develop a more comprehensive understanding of stakeholder identity and obligations (Page 10). There is a noted research gap in the clarity and applicability of stakeholder theory concerning non-human entities, noting that existing frameworks often fail to provide actionable guidance for businesses.

The recommended research agenda emphasizes the need for future studies to focus on identifying the stakes of non-human nature and developing frameworks for effectively managing these relationships (Driscoll and Starik, 2004; Hart and Sharma, 2004). Authors such as Bucholz (2004) advocate for a shift in managerial perspectives to embrace ecological interdependence and sustainability, highlighting the importance of integrating ethical considerations into stakeholder management practices. Driscoll and Starik (2004) call for research to explore the similarities between marginalized stakeholders, including future generations and the natural environment, to enhance stakeholder identification and salience. Hart and Sharma (2004) particularly suggest that future inquiries should also investigate the implications of recognizing non-human stakeholders in corporate strategies, especially in relation to fostering innovation and addressing complex environmental challenges. Overall, for this decade, the literature indicates a more pressing need for a broader understanding of stakeholder attributes that includes power, legitimacy, urgency, and proximity, thereby reinforcing the argument for the natural environment's status as a primary stakeholder (Driscoll and Starik, 2004).

4.5.1.2 Era 2: 2005-2014

The topic of nonhuman stakeholderhood is still perceived in research as an emerging area that has not yet been fully integrated into mainstream stakeholder theory. There is an increasing acknowledgement that traditional stakeholder definitions primarily focus on human entities, leading to a lack of recognition for the environment and other nonhuman stakeholders. For instance, the authors note that "the existing literature has not adequately addressed the implications of extreme weather events and climate change on business strategies," indicating a significant oversight in stakeholder discussions (Haigh and Griffiths, 2009). Researchers continue to critique the anthropocentric focus of traditional stakeholder theory, which often overlooks the intrinsic value of nonhuman entities, suggesting that "the reasoning in vogue led to and refers to the theory of stakeholders" that solely considers human beings (Bazin, 2009)

Research gaps identified in the literature emphasized the need for clearer definitions and frameworks that adequately incorporate nonhuman stakeholders into stakeholder theory. The authors highlight that "the complexities of ecological systems and their long-term impacts on human welfare are frequently ignored," which contributes to a lack of comprehensive frameworks (Norton, 2007) Researchers increasingly call for more empirical studies to explore how nonhuman stakeholders can be integrated into stakeholder management practices, as many contributions do not provide a rigorous examination of the concepts involved (Luoma-aho & Paloviita, 2010). The recommendations for future research generally focus the necessity of developing new theoretical frameworks that recognize the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman stakeholders (Waddock, 2011; Barter, 2011).

4.5.1.3 Era 3: 2015-2024

For this final and most recent era, the research conceptualizes the topic of non-human stakeholderhood as increasingly recognized and gaining traction in research. However, it is still noted that the topic remains contentious and under-explored in academic literature and in practitioner discourse. The research notes that so far, stakeholder theory has largely overlooked nonhuman entities, often relegating them to a secondary status or excluding them entirely from discussions, which reflects a continued anthropocentric bias in the literature (Blount & Conklin, 2023; Gutterman, 2023). This perception is evident in the ongoing debate about the status of nonhuman stakeholders, with some authors advocating for their inclusion based mainly on ethical considerations, while others maintain that the lack of direct representation complicates their classification.

Most authors note that research gaps for this topic are still significant. Past studies have primarily focused on human stakeholders, leading to a lack of clarity regarding the specific needs and interests of nonhuman entities (Smart, 2022). The literature often fails to adequately address the complexities of non-human stakeholder relationships, particularly in terms of their unique characteristics and vulnerabilities (Kortetmäki et al., 2023; Veselova, 2021, 2023). The research states there a notable absence of empirical studies that explore the dynamics of recognition and particularization of nonhuman stakeholders within organizational contexts remains (Tallberg et al., 2022). To address these gaps, suggestions continue to include ideas such as developing clearer frameworks for integrating nonhuman stakeholders into stakeholder theory and practice, as has been the general recommendation on this topic in the past 3 eras. This may include exploring innovative methodologies that facilitate the inclusion of non-human voices in decision-making processes, such as the concept of eco-liability introduced by (Jackson, 2021). It is particularly encouraged to investigate the ethical implications of nonhuman stakeholdership, and there is a notable focus on the suggestion for interdisciplinary approaches that combine insights from ecology, ethics, and stakeholder theory (Kopnina et al., 2024).

5 DISCUSSION

A major issue to still solve in the scholarly discourse remains the lack of consensus in research regarding non-human stakeholders, indicating that while some scholars accept their inclusion based on moral grounds, others reject it due to the absence of direct human interaction (Tens, 2017), its lack of prescriptive power, anthropocentric interpretations of stakeholder theory, or a perceived lack of fit between stakeholder theory and ecological or animal justice goals.

The results of this review show that the conceptions of nonhumans as stakeholders in literature are expanding, even rapidly, both in terms of volume as well as in complexity on what is considered a nonhuman stakeholder. This is exemplified in particular by the fact that the first 15 years of conception were limited almost exclusively to the notion that the nonhuman stakeholder refers to the environment. However, since then, the variation in types of nonhumans considered for stakeholder status has expanded rather substantially. This variation in terminology is both an asset and a hindrance to the research agenda. On the one hand expanding the notion of who/what a stakeholder is may be an important step in integrating stakeholder theory into more ethically sophisticated, de-anthropocentric, and crisis-ready management contexts. On the other hand, research has been criticized by the lack of consensus on the terminology. Even just referring to one common term 'the environment' leaves room for serious ambiguity and ethical concerns of erasure and there remains no consistent consensus as to what all researchers mean when they refer to the environment as a stakeholder, some using more specific ecological terminology than others, and some arguing this terminology is crucial. Based on the sample, the strongest arguments, based on normative and descriptive variants of stakeholder theory, are for 'participating animals' as legitimate stakeholders, particularly since this particular group lacks the ambiguity that makes the status of other nonhuman stakeholder groups more contentious within research. This does not apply to all animals, as the concept itself can become ambiguous and complex, particularly in cases where whole species are considered. However, it seems likely that due to the relative increase of this topic within stakeholder literature. In addition, there is an Emphasis on the potential of animals (including 'biodiver-

sity' and 'key species') as stakeholders for tourism and 'regenerative tourism', as noted by (García-Rosell et al., 2021; García-Rosell & Tallberg, 2021; Husamoglu et al., 2024; Speiran & Hovorka, 2024; Tallberg et al., 2022).

In recent years, there has been an accelerated push among corporations to incorporate more sustainable social meta-norms into Environmental and Social Governance (ESG), which is particularly evident through the practice of increased voluntary reporting and increased reporting standards. Within these standards, there is a widespread acceptance of stakeholder theory not only as a framework but also as a tool managers can use to pertain to ESG. This is particularly relevant to environmental and resource management if the normative goal is to, at the very least, mitigate harm and, at best, restructure management such that 'strong sustainability' (Tapaninaho & Kujala, 2019) and corporate citizenship (Laplume, 2008) are better integrated. Recently, These policies have implicitly recognized and assessed the environment as a stakeholder within a progressive corporate framework (Jackson, 2021). This research direction is particularly relevant as the popularity of the environment as a stakeholder in ESG frameworks and corporate reporting continues to increase. Lischinsky (2015) notes however that "there is a research gap in terms of the actual integration of this concept into management practice; while it is often present in written reports, there remains little empirical evidence as to how this actually improves the organizations duties and responsibilities towards the environment, even if it recognized as a stakeholder." In addition, it has been argued that a lack of engagement with diverse ecological perspectives, particularly those of 'biodiversity custodians and eco-representatives', limits the effectiveness of current Environmental Management and Sustainability frameworks in addressing extinction risks (Kopnina et al., 2024). It is thus a suggestion by many who argue for natural nonhuman stakeholdership to explore the implications of this concept in relation to ESG and corporate reporting.

Lastly, as ecological crises become more common and pressing, it is likely that businesses will be forced to contend with 'the environment' as a key element which, at the very least, affects their business significantly. While the environment as a stakeholder has gained traction in corporate reporting, often due to proxy stakeholder pressure to ensure stronger environmental responsibility, the mere inclusion in text form is all businesses have seemed to manage so far (Lischinsky 2015). While the mere recognition is arguably a step in the right direction for more responsible environmental management, it still suffers from the same weaknesses of Corporate Environmentalism (CE), where there is little real action behind the words. As noted by (Phillips, 2019), the CE 'weak' sustainability approach includes approaches which only engage 'token stakeholders'. The incrementalist approach to Corporate Environmentalism has been criticised for its lack of critical engagement with broader socio-political structures, economic systems, and cultural values (Phillips, 2019). Thus, including 'fringe' stakeholders, as suggested by (Colvin et al., 2016; Hart & Sharma, 2004) may directly mit-

igate the weak sustainability approach in CE and further management contexts. The research also addresses calls for post-humanism and post-anthropocentric organizational frameworks (Banerjee & Arjaliès, 2021; Heikkurinen et al., 2021; Imbrogiano, 2024; Tallberg et al., 2024), challenging speciesism and anthropocentric hierarchies. The recent research which directly argues for engagement with nonhuman stakeholders, in particular with animals, the environment, and other ecological entities, answers this call in while aiming to rise above incrementalist CE approaches.

Based on this review, it seems that, as displayed in [figure 5](#), this stream of research is likely to grow in terms of relevance to management and stakeholder theory in particular as environmental crises will be more and more common and cause more destruction that cannot be ignored by corporations, they will have to consider the instrumental and strategic arguments suggested by (Guterman, 2023;) to include the environment as a stakeholder. In particular, while it remains a rare conception of nonhumans in this context, it may be likely to see more research come out with stakeholder conceptions of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and language learning models. While of course the concept of calling current machine learning ‘true AI’ is rather contested, the strategic implications of its further integration into society – particularly in a business context – may be increasingly relevant to stakeholder theory. Arguments for considering other technological and nonnatural artifacts (Lassen, 2013; Vidgen & McMaster, 1996; Karimova, 2024) as stakeholders may lack the normative power that arguments for natural nonhumans carry, generally relying on complex frameworks like Actor Network Theory (ANT) to argue for their legitimate inclusion. However, the term “AI” carries a much heavier ethical implication, due to the feared potential for true non-human sentience. While the theoretical implications for artificial intelligence’s sentience– thus potential to have agency and interest in a similar fashion to a human or animal in a stakeholder network– have not been thoroughly explored, due to the increased use of language learning models, and the prevalence of ANT in nonhuman stakeholder discussions, it seems likely that this nonhuman actor may become more commonly conceptualised as both stakeholder theory and AI develop.

5.1 Limitations and Recommendations

As with any research paper, this work contains several limitations. While several measures were put into place to ensure transparency and rigour, it is nonetheless a limitation that this review was done by a single reviewer, and

in addition conducted by one with limited knowledge, experience, and resources.

While this review follows the PRISMA protocol and uses a theoretical framework to guide the analysis, the results may be of limited to future research use until a second researcher is able to verify the results and analysis.

Another limitation was imposing the *a priori* framework of Primary Vs Secondary stakeholder status. While some papers do explicitly employ this terminology (For example, Driscoll and Starik, 2004; Jackson, 2021), most papers were ambiguous about this concept, preferring to refer to other stakeholder attributes such as salience attributes. Upon reflection, this aspect may have been better identified if terms such as 'internal' vs 'external', in relation to stakeholder status, were investigated. This is because internal vs external stakeholder status is sometimes viewed as analogous to primary vs secondary stakeholder status, and indeed, some papers (such as Kortetmäki et al., 2023) use this language. However, this also leads to an insight overall on the research agenda, in that this terminology is not popular among researchers, and perhaps could be explored further on how primary vs secondary stakeholder status is conceptualized in relation to nonhuman stakeholders.

In order to address these limitations, I suggest that future research should conduct a more systematic review on the topic, ideally with a second researcher to cross check findings and ensure both transparency and rigour. In addition, the selection criteria should be further developed, since this review offers only surface level analysis on the topic and cannot answer more direct or intentional inquiries about the topic of nonhuman stakeholder status. In addition, it would make more sense to assess the literature based on conceptions of salience attributes, rather than primary vs secondary stakeholder status. Now that it has been established that there is indeed a decent amount of literature currently available which directly discusses nonhuman stakeholder status, it would be particularly pertinent to investigate how the salience attribute of legitimacy is conceived, since this is the most nuanced and ethically charged of the 3 attributes (Santana, 2012).

Despite its limitations, this research offers value in its ability to begin filling a significant research gap within stakeholder theory, in that no systematic review of nonhuman stakeholder status has been conducted to date. However, this review comes at a time where the topic is gaining significant traction, with 2024 being the most prolific year for this topic among its nearly 30 year history. This indicates that this topic is rapidly garnering attention in academia, as well as outside academic discourse. This review can hopefully serve as a basis for further research in terms of understanding where the relevant research gaps are on this topic, what the best course of action for a research agenda is based on the evidence, and other potentially relevant bibliographic and thematic findings for the topic. Areas of study such as Strategic Management, Animal and Environmental Law, and Business Ethics all pertain to concepts such as the legal and moral standing of nonhumans in Management, and in turn how stakeholder legitimacy has been conceived of to date. As suggested by many of the articles

in favour of nonhuman stakeholderhood, answering this question and addressing this issue properly may require a transdisciplinary approach.

As argued by much of the research in favour of nonhuman stakeholderhood, Other arguments for the *intrinsic* valuation of nature to at least be recognized (if not embedded into practice) have gained some traction, such as recently by (Heikkurinen, 2018; Heikkurinen et al., 2016, 2021; Ruuska et al., 2020) Due to the growing recognition of respectful recognition nonhuman integrity within academia, as displayed by the rise in nonhuman stakeholderhood literature, there is the potential for a 'norm diffusion' (see: Lawless et al., 2020; Winston, 2018)of deep ecological philosophies to move from 'the fringes' to the norm in business and management literature.

6 CONCLUSIONS

This thesis set out to explore the academic conceptualization of nonhuman stakeholders within the context of Stakeholder Theory, focusing on how in the academic literature such entities are identified, their salience, and how they align with normative, instrumental, or descriptive purposes. Through a scoping review, the thesis synthesized existing arguments for and against nonhuman stakeholder status, examining the frameworks, themes, and terminologies prevalent in the literature. The evidence gathered for this thesis used a systematic search process in line with the PRISMA-ScR guidelines, which enhanced transparency and reproducibility by providing structured documentation for search strategies, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and study selection processes. The iterative nature of the scoping review allowed for adjustments in search terms and inclusion criteria, which enhances the relevance and comprehensiveness of the findings. This process, as visualized in the PRISMA-ScR flow diagram, eventually led to the identification of 64 papers which were used for the final analysis. Based on this final selection, the findings were organized into both quantitative and qualitative analyses, which offered different insights into how nonhuman stakeholder status is conceptualized in the literature. The qualitative analysis focused on identifying key themes, terminologies, and frameworks in relation to nonhuman stakeholder status.

The findings reveal that the concept of nonhuman stakeholder status, particularly in reference to the environment as a stakeholder, remains a controversial and underexplored area within stakeholder theory. The analysis showed that arguments against granting nonhuman stakeholder status often rely on traditional definitions of agency and stakeholder reciprocity, while arguments in favour increasingly emphasize the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman systems and the moral imperative for inclusive, sustainable practices. Recent literature also shows a growing recognition of nonhuman agency and intrinsic value, which supports their legitimacy as stakeholders and suggests the potential for a paradigm shift in business ethics discourse.

While this study highlights several promising developments, it also exposes significant limitations within the existing discourse. Perhaps the greatest of the-

se limitations is the tendency to conflate nonhuman entities into a single category that overlooks the nuanced needs and characteristics of specific stakeholders, such as animals versus ecosystems. Furthermore, the lack of consensus on terminology and frameworks underscores the need for more precise and inclusive theoretical models.

By focusing on the academic perspective, this thesis contributes to the foundational understanding of nonhuman stakeholder theory and its relevance to stakeholder theory. However, as this field evolves, it is suggested that future research aim to bridge theoretical advancements with practical applications, exploring how organizations can operationalize nonhuman stakeholder inclusion effectively. The findings show that further empirical studies are also needed to examine the impact of recognizing nonhuman stakeholders on organizational decision-making and long-term sustainability.

The arguments for nonhuman stakeholder theory—shown to be more common than arguments against—suggest that the inclusion of nonhuman stakeholders is both a moral and practical necessity in addressing contemporary ecological crises. While challenges persist, the growing focus on nonhuman stakeholder theory in recent literature reflects a broader shift toward more inclusive and ecological approaches in stakeholder theory and management in general. This momentum indicates that the continued integration of nonhuman stakeholders into stakeholder theory has the potential to redefine corporate governance and promote a more holistic and transformative approach to sustainability. Ultimately, this thesis contributes to a deeper understanding of nonhuman stakeholders and their recognition within stakeholder theory, highlighting the call by many researchers for a paradigm shift in how organizations engage with the nonhuman world, particularly in contexts such as corporate environmental management, where interaction with nonhumans is integral to an organization's identity and function.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Search Queries for Data Bases

GOOGLE SCHOLAR SEARCH QUERIES

Search query		Number of results (n=)
1	non human stakeholders "nonhuman stakeholder"	36
2	non human stakeholders "non human stakeholder"	150
3	non human stakeholders "animal stakeholder"	13
4	non human stakeholders "animal stakeholders"	153
5	non human stakeholders "animal as a stakeholder"	6
6	non human stakeholders "nature as a stakeholder"	339
7	non human stakeholders "environment as a stakeholder"	856
8	non human stakeholders "environment as stakeholder"	178
TOTAL		1731

WEB OF SCIENCE FINAL SEARCH QUERY:

TS=("non-human stakeholder" OR "non human stakeholders" OR "animal stakeholders" OR "animals as a stakeholder" OR "nature as a stakeholder" OR "environment as a stakeholder" OR "nonhuman stakeholder" OR "nonhuman stakeholders")

This search yields 41 results from the Core collection. This search configuration avoids the ambiguity and over expanded inclusion that a non-quotation marked item returns, but also includes all the possible lemmatized and character specific utilizations of the terms nonhuman, nature, environment, and animals. The OR operator functions such that all the results within parentheses separated by OR are returned, but they need not relate to one another.

APPENDIX 2: Results Tables 1,2,3

Results Table 1 pg. (60-62)

Results Table 2 pg. (63-68)

Results Table 3 pg. (69-79)

Results for Era 1; *Publications 1995-2004*

Authors, Year	Terminology for NH Discussed	For/Against NH Stakeholder Status	Theoretical Frameworks, Main Theories Referenced	NH Stakeholders Primary Vs. Secondary	Academic Focus And Attitudes Towards Subject Thus Far	Research Agenda Suggestions	Primary Mode Of Argumentation (Normative, Instrumental, Descriptive; Empirical)
STARIK, 1995	"natural environment" and "non-human nature,"	For	Theories referenced include stakeholder theory, particularly the model proposed by Freeman.	Primary	The topic is under-researched, with significant gaps in recognizing the natural environment as a stakeholder	Identifying the stakes of non-human nature and developing frameworks for managing these relationships	Integrative
VIDGEN, 1996	"non-human organization unit" and "technology,"	For	Structuration theory, Latour's concepts of quasi-objects and networks.	Primary	The concept is emerging, with a call for more attention to non-human stakeholders in IT contexts.	Explore symmetrical information system development methods that incorporate both human and non-human stakeholders.	Instrumental
PHILLIPS & REICHART, 2000	Natural environment" and "non-human nature"	Against	Stakeholder theory linked to Rawlsian principle of fairness.	Neither, implied secondary	The topic is met with scepticism, suggesting it is not widely accepted or considered legitimate	Focus on clarifying the role of the environment in stakeholder theory and exploring the ethical obligations organisations have towards it.	Normative

Authors, Year	Terminology for NH Discussed	For/ Against NH Stakeholder Status	Theoretical Frameworks, Main Theories Referenced	NH Stake-holders Primary Vs. Secondary	Academic Focus And Attitudes Towards Subject Thus Far	Research Agenda Suggestions	Primary Mode Of Argumentation (Normative, Instrumental, Descriptive; Empirical)
ORTS AND STRUDLER, 2002	"nature" and "the natural environment"	Against	Environmental ethics and moral philosophy, limitations of cost-benefit analysis in addressing environmental issues	Neither	The concept is often dismissed or even met with derision, indicating it is not considered legitimate	Focus on developing ethical frameworks that adequately address the moral significance of the natural environment and the limitations of stakeholder theory in this context	Normative, Descriptive
DRISCOLL AND STARIK, 2004	"the natural environment" , "non-human natural entities"	For	Stakeholder (develop Mitchell's framework) Saliency upon (1997)	Primary; nature is "primordial and primary stakeholder"	Concept is under researched; previous works on the topic have failed to recognize the natural environment as a legitimate stakeholder with intrinsic worth	Explore the similarities between marginalised stakeholders, including future generations and the natural environment, and develop additional criteria for stakeholder identification and saliency; a shift in managerial perspectives to embrace the complexity of stakeholder relationships, particularly in relation to ecological systems	Normative
BUCHHOLZ, 2004	"Natural environment" and "nature"	For	Rooted in stakeholder theory	Primary	Concept is often overlooked in research, with a prevailing anthropocentric bias; significant gap in research regarding the ethical implications towards environment as stakeholder	Developing mechanisms to incorporate environmental costs into business decision-making and explore the ethical implications of recognizing the environment as a stakeholder.	Normative

Authors, Year	Terminology for NH Discussed	For/ Against NH Stakeholder Status	Theoretical Frameworks, Main Theories Referenced	NH Stake-holders Primary Vs. Secondary	Academic Focus And Attitudes Towards Subject Thus Far	Research Agenda Sug-gestions	Primary Mode Of Argumen-tation (Normative, Instru-mental, Descriptive; Empiri-cal)
HART AND SHARMA, 2004	"endangered species" and "nature,"	For	Radical Transactiveness (RT), Actor-Network Theory (ANT), Dynamic Capabilities	Neither: stakeholders should be treated symmetrically	Significant gap in understanding the potential contributions of fringe stakeholders, which include the poor, weak, isolated, and non-legitimate entities	Future research should explore the implications of including non-human stakeholders in corporate strategies and the potential for innovative business models that prioritise ecological and social sustainability	Instrumental
POULUDI ET AL., 2004	"nonhuman stakeholders" and "nonhuman actors" Technological Artifacts	For	Actor-Network Theory (ANT)	Neither: stakeholders should be treated symmetrically	Significant research gap in the systematic identification of nonhuman actors within the context of information systems	Future research should explore the implications of recognizing non-human stakeholders in various contexts	Descriptive, Instrumental

Results for Era 2; *Publications 2005-2014*

Authors, Year	Terminology for NH Discussed	For/Against NH Stakeholder Status	Theoretical Frameworks, Main Theories Referenced	NH Stakeholders Primary Vs. Secondary	Academic Focus And Attitudes Towards Subject Thus Far	Research Agenda Suggestions	Primary Mode Of Argumentation (Normative, Instrumental, Descriptive; Empirical)
SCHWARTZ 2006	"God", mention of nature	For; Mixed	Stakeholder theory, particularly the criteria for stakeholder identification proposed by Mitchell et al. (1997)	Status remains contested	Concept is emerging but remains under-researched	Explore the intersection of spirituality and business to enhance understanding of stakeholder theory	Normative, Instrumental
NORTON, 2007	"the natural environment"	For	stakeholder theory, particularly the work of Mitchell et al. (1997) and Driscoll & Starik (2004)	Primary	non-human stakeholderhood is perceived in research as a contentious issue;	develop frameworks that better account for the intrinsic value of the environment and its role in economic systems; shift in how stakeholders are identified and valued in both theory and practice	Normative
BAZIN, 2008	natural environment, nature	Against	Stakeholder theory	Neither	Topic is still emerging and not yet fully established in the literature, met with criticism; seen as exception rather than 'norm'	Need for a more nuanced understanding of corporate responsibility towards nature; bio-ontocentric perspective seen as better approach to address the complexity of the natural environment	Normative, Descriptive

Authors, Year	Terminology for NH Discussed	For/ Against NH Stakeholder Status	Theoretical Frameworks, Main Theories Referenced	NH Stake-holders Primary Vs. Secondary	Academic Focus And Attitudes Towards Subject Thus Far	Research Agenda Sug-gestions	Primary Mode Of Argumen-tation (Normative, Instru-mental, Descriptive; Empiri-cal)
HAMMOND AND BOOTH 2009	"the environment"	For	grounded in stakeholder theory, particularly Freeman's (1984) broad and Starik(1995)	Primary	Concept overlooked stakeholder management literature, is in	comprehensive frameworks that integrate environmental considerations into stakeholder management practices, as well as the development of economic instruments like pollution taxes to ensure fair distribution of costs and benefits between businesses and the environment.	Normative
HAIGH AND GRIFFITHS, 2009	"natural environment" and "non-human nature"	For	stakeholder theory, particularly Freeman's broad definition of stakeholders, and the work of Mitchell et al. (1997) on stakeholder identification.	Primary	concept (natural environment as a stakeholder) is gaining traction, but there is still a need for further research; the debate has become protracted and complex	urgent need for businesses to engage with the natural environment directly; multidisciplinary research agenda that integrates ecological and management perspectives to better understand these interactions; explore the dynamics of this relationship.	Instrumental, Normative
LAINE, 2010	'nature' and 'the natural environment'; conscious of distinction	Against	Stakeholder theory and past critiques towards environment as stakeholder; particularly Phillips and Reichart (2000) and Orts and Strudler (2002)	Neither	perceived as lacking clarity and rigour in research, terms used interchangeably without clear definitions; lack of consensus has not been adequately addressed in previous works	Need for deeper exploration of the definitions and implications of nature and the natural environment within the stakeholder model, need for clearer conceptual distinctions	Normative

Authors, Year	Terminology for NH Discussed	For/ Against NH Stakeholder Status	Theoretical Frameworks, Main Theories Referenced	NH Stake-holders Primary Vs. Secondary	Academic Focus And Attitudes Towards Subject Thus Far	Research Agenda Sug-gestions	Primary Mode Of Argumen-tation (Normative, Instru-mental, Descriptive; Empiri-cal)
LUOMA-AHO AND PALOVIITA, 2010	"non-human entities," "technological sphere," and "ecological factors,"	For	Actor-Network Theory (ANT)	Neither: contextual/case specific	previous works on the topic of non-human stakeholders have not received sufficient attention	more empirical studies to better understand NH roles and impacts, examining the processes of translation and the identification of non-human stakeholders across various contexts and cultures	Instrumental, Descriptive
WADDOCK, 2011	Gaia; includes "living beings," "ecosystems," and "future generations"	For	Stakeholder Theory; Freeman's Broad definition	Primary	Emerging, topic remains under-researched, particularly in terms of integrating the environment into mainstream stakeholder discussions	explore the implications of a Gaia-centric perspective on stakeholder theory and how it can inform sustainable practices and policies	Normative
BARTER, 2011	"the natural environment" and "nature"	Both; primarily Against	ecocentrism and bio-ontocentrism, ethical and political interpretations of stakeholder theory	Neither; Natural environment cannot be discrete stakeholder	concept is perceived as problematic in research; topic is emerging but not yet fully integrated into mainstream stakeholder theory	shift from an anthropocentric to an ecocentric or bio-ontocentric perspective, develop new theoretical framework, as existing stakeholder theory deemed "no longer fit for purpose" for advancing the discourse on sustainable development	Descriptive, Normative

Authors, Year	Terminology for NH Discussed	For/ Against NH Stakeholder Status	Theoretical Frameworks, Main Theories Referenced	NH Stake-holders Primary Vs. Secondary	Academic Focus And Attitudes Towards Subject Thus Far	Research Agenda Sug-gestions	Primary Mode Of Argumen-tation (Normative, Instru-mental, Descriptive; Empiri-cal)
JUSTESEN ET AL. 2011	"natural environment" and "moor frog" for		actor-network theory (ANT); Stakeholder Theory and Freeman's Broad (1984) defitino	Neither; emphasise fluidity of stakeholder relationships	Topic is under researched; anthropocentric bias limits scholarly attention to the topic	explore the fluid and dynamic nature of stakeholder relationships, particularly how non-human entities can be integrated into stakeholder theory and management practices	Descriptive And Normative, Empirical
DRISCOLL ET AL. 2012	"the natural environment" and "nature" for		Catholic Social Thought (CST) and Anabaptist-Mennonite Theology (AMT); spiritual and ethical perspective on stakeholder theory	Primary (explicit)	Concept is perceived with reluctance in research; topic has gained some momentum, but remains under-researched and somewhat niche	explore the integration of CST and AMT principles into stakeholder theory and examining the relationships between marginalised stakeholders, including future generations and the natural environment.	Normative
GIBSON, 2012	"The environment", "nature" against		stakeholder theory, critique of aesthetic values as a basis for environmental management	Neither	concept has gained some traction, but remains conceptually vague, lacks prescriptive power; considered a niche perspective	focus on developing clearer metrics for sustainability and exploring the implications of stakeholder theory in the context of environmental management.	Normative, Instrumental
TRYGGESTAD ET AL., 2013	Moor Frogs	Inconclusive	Actor-Network Theory (ANT), Stakeholder Theory	Neither; critique the static nature of a priori definitions of stakeholders	Topic is an ongoing debate within stakeholder theory, suggests it is a legitimate area of inquiry but still lacking comprehensive research	Explore dynamic interactions between human and non-human actors in project settings a more; moving away from A priori definitions of stakeholders and their salience; allow them to emerge through processes	Normative, Empirical

Authors, Year	Terminology for NH Discussed	For/ Against NH Stakeholder Status	Theoretical Frameworks, Main Theories Referenced	NH Stake-holders Primary Vs. Secondary	Academic Focus And Attitudes Towards Subject Thus Far	Research Agenda Suggestions	Primary Mode Of Argumentation (Normative, Instrumental, Descriptive; Empirical)
LUKASIEWICZ ET AL., 2013	"The environment"	For	Social Justice Framework (SJF), which incorporates principles of distributive and procedural justice	Inconclusive	concept is often perceived as ambiguous in research; various proxy groups claim represent the environment but often express conflicting needs	focus on resolving the 'identity crisis' of the environment as a stakeholder and improving its representation in decision-making processes	Normative
LASSEN 2013	management instruments, strategy papers, and communication tools considered "non-human actors"	For	Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)	Neither: contextual/case specific	topic has been given insufficient attention in existing literature; lack recognition of non-human actors within the social science due to lack of interest, rather than lack of data	explore the implications of non-human agency in various organizational contexts, particularly in healthcare settings influenced by New Public Management principles	Instrumental, Descriptive
STOBER, 2014	"Nature" with a capital "N" to personify ecosystems and emphasize their intrinsic value	For	Stakeholder Theory; Freeman's (1984) Broad definition	Primary	there is a growing discourse around sustainability and corporate social responsibility, but specific inclusion of nature as a stakeholder remains under-researched	Examine the perceptions of leaders and followers regarding environmental issues and developing nature-centred leadership practices; explore how leadership theory can incorporate environmental sustainability	Normative

Authors, Year	Terminology for NH Discussed	For/Against NH Stakeholder Status	Theoretical Frameworks, Main Theories Referenced	NH Stakeholders Primary Vs. Secondary	Academic Focus and Attitudes Towards Subject Thus Far	Research Agenda Suggestions	Primary Mode Of Argumentation (Normative, Instrumental, Descriptive; Empirical)
LISCHINSKY, 2015	The Environment	Inconclusive	Stakeholder theory, particularly the works of Freeman (1984)	Secondary	concept has been perceived as problematic in research; ongoing debates about its applicability and implications	Focus on the discursive choices made in corporate environmental communication and how these choices affect the recognition of the environment's role as a stakeholder	Empirical, Descriptive
NORTH AND MANCINI, 2016	Animals	For	stakeholder theory, interaction design, and animal behaviour	Primary	animal-computer interaction (ACI) is an emerging discipline, but has not conceptualized animals as legitimate stakeholders	need for interdisciplinary approaches that integrate insights from animal science, interaction design, and behavioural studies to better address the unique needs of animal stakeholders.	Normative
VARNER, 2016	"Any nonhuman life-form that stands to benefit from or be harmed from the shared activities of a collective"	For	Deweyan democratic framework, Eco-Feminist Theory, environmental pragmatism	Primary	Concept is not well researched; significant gap in the literature regarding NH inclusion in participatory processes	exploring how to institutionalise the inclusion of nonhuman interests in democratic practices and developing educational frameworks that foster habits of inquiry that respect and understand nonhuman voices	Normative

MCCAULEY ET AL., 2017	"The environment"	For	procedural justice, recognition justice, and the need for a pluralistic approach to understanding justice	Primary	the concept, particularly in the context of energy justice, is significantly under-researched and often overlooked in existing literature	need for interdisciplinary collaboration between social and natural sciences to address the complexities of energy developments affecting both human and non-human stakeholders	Normative
TENS, 2017	"Future Generations"	For	stakeholder theory, particularly Freeman's broad definition of stakeholders, and the work of Mitchell et al. (1997) on stakeholder identification.	Primary non-social	neglect of consideration for future family generations as stakeholders: this area is niche and requires further exploration	focus on further exploring the implications of recognizing non-human and non-social stakeholders and the evolving nature of stakeholder relationships over time	Normative
ZAMANSKY ET AL. 2017	"animals," "pets"	For	Requirements elicitation (RE), Animal-Computer Interaction (ACI)	Primary	Significant research gap; ACI is emerging, but NH Stakeholdership needs more attention particularly in this context	Developing guidelines for elicitation techniques, increasing awareness of available RE methods for non-human users, and documenting case studies to enhance the understanding of this emerging field	Normative
CONNOLLY & CULLEN, 2018	Animals, Animals in Organizations	For	stakeholder ethic of care framework	Primary	Significant research gap for animals in organizational and management studies in particular; dismissive attitude towards animals in these disciplines;	call for more empirical studies to better understand NH roles and impacts, examining the processes of translation and the identification of non-human stakeholders across various contexts and cultures	Normative, descriptive

					Discussions are “ongoing”		
GAUTHIER, 2018	the natural environment	For	Stakeholder Theory; Freeman’s (1984) Broad definition	Primary	Topic of nonhuman stakeholders, particularly the natural environment, is gaining attention but still requires further exploration.	Need for understanding the mechanisms on how firms can create value by recognizing the natural environment as a stakeholder; future empirical studies on the topic should move beyond traditional data sources to include more innovative approaches towards	Instrumental
HEIKKINEN ET AL., 2018	Nature; including “animals, plants and the natural environment”	For	Combines capability approach with radical democracy	Primary	Concept is still emerging in research, with limited empirical studies available to support its practical application	focus on developing grounded understandings of non-human participation in urban ecosystems and explore innovative ways to facilitate their engagement in sustainability efforts	Normative

HEIKKINEN ET AL., 2019	"nature"	For	Stakeholder theory, Radical democracy	Both; Dynamic and context dependent	Perspective of NH stakeholder research gaining traction but still not widely accepted in mainstream stakeholder research	Focus on developing frameworks for understanding and integrating non-human stakeholders in urban ecosystem management and sustainability efforts	Descriptive, Normative
KENEHAN, 2019	Animals, Research Animals	For	Stakeholder Theory, Consequentialist Moral Theories	Primary	Topic of research animals is significantly under-researched within the field of stakeholder theory	future research should focus on integrating animal welfare into business ethics and exploring viable alternatives to animal testing	Descriptive, Normative
KUJALA, ET AL., 2019	"nature" , "the natural environment", "living and non-living nature"	For	stakeholder theory, Strong sustainability, ecocentrism	Primary	Concept is emerging but still under-researched; existing research has been largely conceptual rather than empirical	call for multidisciplinary research that combines stakeholder theory with ecological studies to better understand the complexities of nature-inclusive stakeholder engagement	Normative, Instrumental
DANDY AND PORTH, 2021	Forests; trees, invertebrates, and ecosystems	For	stakeholder theory, ecological communication	Primary (context specific)	Concept still emerging in research, with limited applications to date	focus on developing methodologies that facilitate the inclusion of non-human perspectives in policymaking, thus enriching the understanding of ecological relationships and promoting stronger sustainability	Normative

GARCÍA-ROSELL ET AL., 2021	Elements of nature; i.e. "the forest" and "the river"	For	cultural marketing, organizational improvisation	Primary	Concept is emerging but has received limited attention in existing research.	further explore the dynamics of co-creation involving non-human stakeholders and the implications for tourism management practices	Descriptive, Normative
GARCÍA-ROSELL AND TALLBERG, 2021	"animals" and "animal workers"	For	Feminist stakeholder theory, feminist ethics and ethics of care	Primary	topic is emerging but has not been extensively researched, particularly for animals in tourism	focus on exploring the implications of this recognition for business practices and the ethical treatment of animals in various sectors	Normative
GORDON AND ROUDAVSKI 2021	more-than-human communities, Bald Cypress Tree	For	ecological justice and more-than-human justice	Primary	nonhuman stakeholdership is gaining recognition in research, yet it remains underexplored in practical design contexts	focus on developing methodologies that incorporate nonhuman perspectives into infrastructure planning and management, fostering collaborative relationships between human and nonhuman stakeholders	Normative
JACKSON, 2021	"the environment"	For	stakeholder theory, particularly Clarkson (1995); critiques of Limited Liability; Eco-Liability	Secondary (explicit)	Topic is emerging and gaining recognition within corporate governance discussions; yet does not adequately address urgency of environmental crises	focus on developing clearer legal frameworks for eco-liability and exploring the implications of recognizing non-human stakeholders in corporate governance.	Normative, Descriptive

MERSKIN, 2021	Animals	For	Stakeholder Theory; intersection of animal rights with social justice	Primary	Significant research gap for discussions on animals as stakeholders	exploring the implications of recognizing animals as stakeholders and developing ethical frameworks that incorporate their interests into business and public relations practices	Normative
VESELOVA AND GAZIULUSOY, 2021	"natural entities", "natural nonhuman stakeholders", "multispecies collectives"	For	collaborative and participatory design (C&PD), Stakeholder Theory	Primary	Topic is emerging, but mainstream C&PD and Stakeholder theory remains predominantly anthropocentric	further develop the typology of nonhuman stakeholders, explore the interconnections between human activities and natural systems, and re-conceptualize participation in C&PD to be more inclusive of nonhuman entities	Descriptive
SMART, 2022	Animals; "participating animals"	For	Stakeholder Theory	Primary: prefers term "Full" stakeholders	significant research gap towards <i>animals</i> as nonhuman stakeholders in particular	explore the implications of recognizing animals as stakeholders and to develop frameworks that can effectively integrate their interests into business practices	Descriptive, Normative
TALLBERG ET AL., 2022	"Nonhuman animals"	For	feminist ethics of care	Primary	perceived as controversial in research; significant gap in empirical studies on nonhuman stakeholders in organisational contexts	explore diverse nonhuman contexts and develop multispecies methods to better understand animal interests and their implications for business ethics	Normative

VESELOVA, 2022	"natural nonhuman stakeholders"	For	DSRP (distinctions, systems, relationships, and perspectives) framework for systems thinking	Context Dependent	Nonhuman entities disregarded in favour of human-centric approaches; consensus on which natural entities count as stakeholders is still lacking	developing the C&PD and stakeholder typologies to accommodate various design contexts; integrating multidisciplinary knowledge to improve understanding of the interconnections between human activities and natural systems	Normative
CONKLIN AND BLOUT, 2023	"animals" and "the natural environment"	Against	Stakeholder Theory	Neither	existing literature lacks coherence and clarity; significant confusion remains on who qualifies as a stakeholder	focus on developing a more actionable and concrete framework for stakeholder theory that can effectively address the complexities of including non-human entities	Instrumental, Descriptive
BRISIBE, 2023	"natural environment"	For	Natural law theory and ecocentric ethics; legal personality	Primary	Concept of NH stakeholderhood is often met with scepticism in research	explore the operationalization of legal rights for nature and the implications of recognizing non-human stakeholders in various legal and cultural contexts	Normative

GUTTERMAN, 2023	"The Environment"	For	stakeholder theory, ESG and ISO 26000 guidelines	Primary	(environment as a stakeholder) gaining recognition but still faces challenges in being fully integrated into traditional stakeholder theory	developing more robust frameworks for integrating environmental considerations into business practices, exploring implications of recognizing NH stakeholders in various industries	Normative, Descriptive
KORTETMÄKI ET AL., 2023	"Nonhuman nature"; emphasis on insufficiency of single term	For	status-oriented model of recognition	Inconclusive ; advocates recognizing external (secondary) stakeholders	topic remains under-researched, particularly in terms of particularizing nonhuman stakeholders	interdisciplinary collaborations to deepen the understanding of nonhuman stakeholders and their roles in sustainability efforts	Integrative, emphasis on Normative
TALGORN AND ULLERUP 2023	Aspects of Planetary ecosystem (e.g. " animals, plants, and natural elements")	For	post-anthropocentrism	Primary	gaining traction in research, yet it remains underexplored in practical applications	focus on developing tools and methodologies that facilitate empathy for nonhuman stakeholders to improve the understanding of their roles in sustainability efforts	Normative
VESELOVA, 2023	"natural nonhumans,"	For	non-anthropocentric environmental ethics and systems thinking	Contextual	While recently gaining traction in research, the overall body of work remains limited and under-researched	investigate the identification of relevant natural NH stakeholders, the implications of their inclusion in design processes, and the development of actionable methodologies for engaging with these stakeholders	Normative

<p>ATUNES AL 2024</p>	<p>ET</p>	<p>"natural environment" and "nature" For</p>	<p>Stakeholder theory; Particularly works by Freeman (1984) and Mitchell et al. (1997)</p>	<p>Secondary; "dormant" stakeholder</p>	<p>specific intersection of stakeholder theory and the natural environment remains underexplored in research</p>	<p>explore the perceptions of other stakeholders on topic; conduct further studies in different contexts to better understand the dynamics of NH stakeholders in organisational strategies</p>	<p>Instrumental, Descriptive</p>
<p>BRISIBE, 2024</p>	<p>ET</p>	<p>"the natural environment" , For "nature"</p>	<p>natural law theory, ecocentric approach to Rights of Nature (RoN), legal personality</p>	<p>Primary</p>	<p>emerging but still faces significant scepticism and contestation in existing literature; discourse remains under-researched, especially in the context of developing countries</p>	<p>focused on operationalizing the legal rights of nature and exploring the implications of recognizing non-human stakeholders in various legal and corporate contexts</p>	<p>Normative</p>
<p>GULARI AL., 2024</p>	<p>ET</p>	<p>"nonhuman nature" For</p>	<p>Post-humanist practice theory</p>	<p>Primary</p>	<p>Underrepresented; prevailing perception in research often marginalizes nonhuman stakeholders</p>	<p>focus on understanding how the inclusion of nonhuman stakeholders can be made meaningful through various practices of knowing, rather than merely seeking to include them as an afterthought</p>	<p>Normative; Empirical</p>

HUSAMOGLU 2024	"non-human species," "ecosystems," "climate," "habitats,"	and	For	stakeholder theory, ecological semiotics, actor-network theory (ANT)	Primary	still evolving and remains somewhat niche; has not been extensively integrated into traditional stakeholder theory	need for empirical studies to validate the interactions between human and NH stakeholders, explore the philosophical underpinnings of regenerative tourism; integration of natural sciences into tourism practices	Normative
KARIMOVA, 2024	AI; ChatGPT		For	Actor-Network Theory (ANT); Bakhtin's polyphonic insights and Social Construction of Technology (SCOT)	Primary	Particularly in the context of AI, stakeholder dynamics have been significantly under researched	significant agenda to investigate the implications of AI as a non-human stakeholder, particularly in understanding its evolving role in society and the ethical considerations that arise from this relationship	Integrative
KOPINA AL., 2024	Biodiversity; "non-human stakeholders" "biodiversity custodians"	as	For	stakeholder theory, deep ecology approach to ESG	Primary	Met with reluctance in ESG research; significant research gaps for acknowledgment of NH stakeholders within corporate decision-making processes	Investigate barriers to integrating biodiversity into corporate practices and developing more robust frameworks for extinction accounting	Normative
SPEIRAN AND HOVORKA, 2024	"animals" and "wild animals"	and	For	wildlife equity theory and conservation welfare	Primary	significant literature gap on the engagement of animals as stakeholders in tourism contexts	Develop methodologies to better understand animal agency and the implications of their inclusion in tourism practices; compassionate and ethical approach to wildlife tourism	Normative

WU, 2024	"nature"	For	Epistemic justice theory, Rights of Nature (RoN)	Primary	emerging and gaining traction, but remains under researched	need for further exploration of how NH stakeholder engagement practices; develop frameworks that better incorporate NH stakeholders into decision-making processes	Normative
ZURO, 2024	"nature," "the environment", "non-human environment"	Largely against; Inconclusive	Stakeholder Theory, neo-institutional theory, systems theory	Secondary	remains a contentious issue in research, with significant differences in definitions and interpretations among scholars	Need to redefine of stakeholder theory in context of environment; develop a model for sustainability management that goes beyond the traditional organization-centric views;	Descriptive
YOUN AND BAEK, 2024	Broad range (e.g. "nature," "technology," "infrastructure", "abstract concepts")	For	Actor-Network Theory (ANT), Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO)	Stakeholder Symmetry	Topic still emerging and has not been extensively explored within the design domain	explore the diverse characteristics of non-humans, develop methods for prioritising non-human actors, address power dynamics within stakeholder relationships	Descriptive, Normative

APPENDIX 3: TERMINOLOGY OF TYPES OF NONHUMAN STAKEHOLDERS REFERENCED

	The Environment, The Natural environment, nonhuman nature, and Nature	Animals	Other Natural Nonhuman Entities	Collective Entities & Concepts	Man-Made Entities
	natural environment	animals and animal workers	endangered species	abstract concepts	AI
	the natural environment	animals and wild animals	Gaia	non-human organization unit	ChatGPT
	Nature	Animals Research Animals	ecosystems	Future Generations	technological sphere
	the natural environment'	animals and pets	biodiversity custodians	nonhuman actors	technology
	the Natural environment	Animals	Aspects of Planetary ecosystem (e.g. "animals plants and natural elements")	non-human entities	infrastructure
	nature	participating animals	Forests, trees, invertebrates and ecosystems	God	management instruments
	the natural environment	Nonhuman animals	non-human species		strategy papers
	natural environment nature	Moor Frogs	ecosystems		communication tools
	nature		climate		
	Nature with a capital N		habitats		

non-human environment		Bald Cypress Tree		
the natural environment		Any nonhuman life-form that stands to benefit from or be harmed from the shared activities of a collective		
nature		non-human natural entities		
the environment		natural entities		
nature		natural non-human stakeholders		
the natural environment		multispecies collectives		
nature		living and non-living nature		
the natural environment				
nature				
the natural environment				
the natural environment and non-human nature				
natural environment and non-human nature				
The Environment;				
the natural environment				
Nonhuman nature				
nature				
The Environment				
the natural environment				
nature				

	natural environment				
n=	31	9	17	5	8

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