

# ECOLOGICAL VALUING WHEN THE STAKES ARE HIGH: ON THE PRACTICALITIES OF NATURE-CULTURAL FLOURISHING

Mandy de Wilde

Department of Anthropology, University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Irene van Oorschot

Life Sciences and Society Lab, KU Leuven, Belgium

## Abstract:

In the midst of unfolding ecological crises - global warming, soil and air contamination, toxic spills and pollution - feminist-inspired STS invites us to explore possibilities for living and dying well with human and nonhuman others (Haraway 2016, Tsing, Bubandt, Gan, and Swanson 2017). But what constitutes 'living well' and 'dying well' in different situations? And how are conflicts and uncertainties about living well handled in practice?

Empirically examining the ways in which judgments are made about living and dying well, this panel explores how *valuation studies* may contribute to these broader feminist concerns. From valuation studies we learn that what is qualified as 'good' is an outcome of situated and local undertakings (Mol, Moser, and Pols 2010). The ecological 'good', then, is not homogeneous nor an abstract good: depending on the situation, there are different 'registers of valuing' (Heuts and Mol 2013; Mol 2016) at stake. These registers – also interchangeably referred to as 'regimes', 'economies', or 'worlds' – represent ways to attach value and distribute ethical, political, and affective attachments. In nature conservation, for instance, the ecological good takes the shape of an uneasy alliance between conservation and climate adaptation; in urban green management the ecological good is the outcome of a clash between upholding public safety and biodiversity; while in sustainable households it can be more or less embodied as personal hygiene. Put differently, to practice ecological value(s) entails drawing heterogeneous registers of valuing together, constantly, sometimes aligning them, often leaving them in tension, and at other times trading them off. Further, various modes of knowing – e.g. from tactile, embodied and affective knowledges to scientific standards, protocols and formats - are implicated in attaining an ecological good of some sort.

As part of those alignments, tensions, and trade-offs, some relations will flourish, for instance between ecologically-minded citizens and the microbes and other awkward creatures (Ginn, Beisel, and Barua 2014) they invite into their households and bodies. Other relations are marked as undesirable and ecologically 'bad', for instance between invasive species and their certain ecologies. This raises the question how alignments, tensions, and trade-offs between registers of valuing are navigated in practice, and as a result, which specific ways of living are made to matter. Whose interests and which relations are at stake when navigating potentially contrasting registers of valuing? What are the controversies involved? And how may such practices of navigating different registers of valuing in practice help us (re)think what nature-cultural flourishing entails in the wake of ecological crises?

In this panel we invite contributions that think with specific controversies and cases to best draw out the local, situated character of achieving an ecological 'good', to analyse which registers of valuing are mobilised, and which relations may be made to flourish as part of such judgments. We are particularly interested in case studies and ethnographies that:

- examine the ways a plurality of registers of valuing are negotiated in practices, with a particular emphasis on potential conflicts, tensions, and trade-offs between these different registers;

- explore such issues in e.g. nature conservation, urban green management, sustainable lifestyles and biotechnology;
- highlight the relationship between registers of valuing and knowledge practices, including both formal knowledges and embodied and affective modes of knowing.

**Key words:**

ecology; valuing; knowledges