

# 8.

## A life of their own: children, animals, and sustainable development

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## INTRODUCTION

Where are the animals, when “sustainable development” is considered? As it is an attempt to address the problems of how life is becoming more and more threatened by human action, one might expect that the United Nations Strategy for Sustainable Development (UN n.d.) would consider the place of animals in this major project of reimagining a liveable future for the planet. However, animals are remarkably absent from the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda. None of the 17 SDGs *explicitly* refer to animals, and when they *are* indirectly mentioned as “fishes”, in SDG 14, or endangered “species” in SDG 15, they are perceived as *resources*. Animals are, therefore, absent, as agents that co-inhabit the same planet with humans, sharing a common vital condition and a history of co-evolution. Rather, they are indirectly suggested as means to an end: making a better life and future *for humans*, in (and not *with*) the planet.

Animals’ invisibility in the international agenda for sustainability has its counterpart in the wider landscape of social and scientific representations. It is rooted in the deep anthropocentrism that characterizes Western thought (founded in the elective affinities between cartesianism, Christian traditions, and modern capitalism) and which puts the human at the centre of all ontological and epistemological concerns. This “anthropological machine” (Agamben 2004) permanently reinstalls a primal rupture between human and non-human, man and animal, humanity and nature. Non-human animals tend to be subsumed in debates around reductive dichotomies such as nature/culture, and put on the side of nature – as “instinctive”, “non-rational”, “non-moral” beings, over which humans have exerted their dominion, naturalizing human supremacy over the non-human. Whether they are loved (as pets), consumed (as meat or clothing), feared (as wild animals), or even hated (as rats or snakes), they are “invisible” in their specific beings, and denied lives of their own (Wolch and Emel 1995). Their radical Otherness is kept at a distance, and contact avoided – a contact that, as suggested by Walter Benjamin, brings forward our greatest fear of animals, and that is only overcome through practices of domination (Fudge 2002).

Concomitantly, children are highly visible in the SDGs. Although none of the latter is explicitly dedicated to them, several (such as 1 to 6) are ultimately justified by the fact that children are the vulnerable individuals most affected by the problems that the SDGs aim to solve for a common future.

From extreme poverty, to education and health, children are present in the rhetoric of sustainable development as the ultimate recipients that legitimize the changes needed to reach the SD targets. This difference in visibility of animals and children hides, nevertheless, a shared common condition. Like foals, children are constantly “put on hold”, expected to “bloom” in an uncertain future, and looked at as underdeveloped beings, that have yet to be coached (by adults) toward maturity, in order to complete their (full) human condition. As *young beings*, they appeal to the (adult) human protection and guardianship. For the analytical purpose of our argument, we can recognize that children and animals share a common condition of *vulnerability*, by means of a lack of reason, on the one hand, and of moral capacity, on the other (Faulkner 2011).

In this chapter we explore the theoretical human/non-human dichotomy that conducts to the explicit exclusion of animals in the United Nations SDGs. Moreover, we advance the hypothesis that by studying children’s relationships with animals, we find illustrations of alternative and different patterns of relating to the non-human world. Specific children-animal practices such as relationships with pets and veganism may constitute a gateway to understand the construction of alternative ways to relate to the planet, some with the potential of moving toward the (always) changeable target of sustainability. Furthermore, today’s children represent the future generations toward whom all SDGs are oriented, and whose practices will be decisive for the implementation of a sustainable development strategy.

Our approach is three-fold. First, we argue that challenging the anthropocentric perspective is a necessary theoretical standpoint to unsettle dominant modes of conceptualizing the social order and to produce cutting edge knowledge bringing added value to mainstream science. Instead, we draw on an informed *biocentric* approach (Agamben 2004; Faulkner 2011) that looks at animals, children, and all forms of life as diverse beings in their own right, having *a life of their own*, challenging conceptions that reduce them to human/adult projections (anthropomorphism).

Therefore, and secondly, we argue for a fluidity between nature and culture. In these *naturecultures*, humans (adults and children) and animals share a history of co-habitation, co-evolution, and of embodied sociability between species, as developed by Haraway (2003). Following the author, we argue for an “implosion” of nature and culture as discrete, separate entities, and advocate for a concept of sustainable development that acknowledges

the “historically specific, joint lives” of all forms of life, which are “bonded in significant otherness”, and share the challenge of building a “necessary joint future” (Haraway 2003, 16).

For this, and thirdly, it is crucial to bring animals into the critical discussion of sustainable development. Acknowledging their presence, and proposing an epistemological and praxiological perspective in which we live *with* animals (and not *through* them: using them as resources exclusively for human purposes). In this, we take a “more-than-human approach”, in which we may “join with non-humans as sentient beings engaged in the tasks of carrying on with their lives” (Ingold 2013).

Following Ingold (2013), two main premises are pursued. First, we take every living being (child, adult, animal, or other) as a *going on*, a constant *becoming*; they certainly are *beings in the present*, but this social embeddedness does not imprison them in stable or definite forms or a fixed and predictable destiny. Second, we acknowledge that *becoming* is always *becoming with*, a *relational approach* in which every being is what it is because it is positioned within a community (Lestel 2014) or collective (Latour 2005). It is precisely through their differences that humans and animals connect, in what Lestel (2014) calls *hybrid communities*. In this sense, the *relation* is the smallest unit of analysis possible (Haraway 2003). We propose to untangle the knots of these relational becomings by looking at their shared *practices*. We suggest that the ways in which children relate to, and live *with*, animals, are clues to new understandings of social order and inspiring examples to decision makers, as they may fuel more sustainable ways of inhabiting a multispecies planet.

We begin by addressing the main critical themes in the relationship between animals and sustainability. We then explore the key advances and setbacks in the social construction of children and animals as full distinct beings, holding rights of their own. We proceed to briefly describe how children are socialized by the dominant adult culture, into progressively objectifying animals. Subsequently, we focus on modes of relation which are alternative to this dominant culture, namely through two examples of the “collaborative relatedness” between children and animals: the role of pets in children’s lives; and practices of veganism. We conclude by suggesting that children’s relationships with animals may help us to problematize the concept of sustainability, so as to encompass non-human animals as legitimate companions in their own right.

## ANIMALS AND SUSTAINABILITY: CHALLENGES AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Eating animals is symbolically charged in most contemporary societies. It is a symbol of distinction that positions individuals in a particular social class structure (Bourdieu 1979). It is also connected with celebratory occasions such as Christmas and Easter, where turkey and lamb are eaten respectively. Apart from such valorization of meat consumption as a symbol of social distinction in food taste, it is also conveyed as the core ingredient in a dish, where vegetables and legumes are perceived to have a secondary role, oftentimes placed in restaurant menus as side dishes. According to several sociological studies on food, a dish without meat is not considered a proper or complete meal (Murcott 1982). Notions of propriety in food consumption put meat at the centre of eating habits. Moreover, meat consumption is also associated with strength, manhood, wholesomeness, and a feeling of completeness (Fiddes 1991).

### CONVENING EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

Given the symbolic status of meat in most Westernized societies, the importance given to meat consumption, and how children are socialized from a very young age to get a taste for meat, is not surprising. Evidence of such a strong taste for meat (but not fish) is seen in the literature on school meals. For example, a study conducted in eight primary and secondary schools in Portugal concluded that children appreciate more meat based dishes (spaghetti Bolognese, meat balls, beef) rather than vegetarian or fish based dishes (Truninger and Teixeira 2015). In Portugal, animal protein consumption is high and has been increasing over the last decades (apart from the years of the economic crisis, when there was a decrease in meat consumption, particularly red meat). On average, and per year, meat consumption per capita in Portugal is about 108kg (INE 2016), which shows how the Portuguese population is distancing itself from the principles of a Mediterranean Diet, in which animal protein consumption is reduced and pulses, vegetables, legumes, and cereals are considered some of the key ingredients (Truninger and Freire 2014). Meat consumption tends to be higher among men (even among young boys, than among girls), an association that reproduces the link between meat consumption and manhood/strength (Graça et al. 2015). Beyond the production of food, animals are also important for producing clothing, namely through products such as leather, wool, and fur.

According to a FAO report (2006), animal husbandry practices are responsible for 18% of greenhouse gas emissions (more than the combined exhaust gasses from all transportation (13%), as well as for 20%-33% of fresh water consumption in the world. It is worth underlining that to produce 1 pound of beef, one needs 2,500 gallons of water (Beckett and Oltjen 1993). Livestock is also responsible for the destruction of land, and the principal cause of species extinction, ocean dead zones, water pollution, and habitat destruction (Oppenlander 2011). Animal farming is the key cause for other environmental impacts: 91% of Amazon destruction; up to 137 plants, animal, and insect species are lost every day due to rainforest destruction (Oppenlander 2013; Savetheamazon.org) and wildlife is destroyed because of the killing of wild animals to protect livestock (Maughan 2012). Finally, the report of FAO (2011) reveals that worldwide at least 50% of grain is fed to livestock. Alarmingly, 82% of starving children live in countries where food is mainly given to the cattle who will then be eaten in Western countries (FAO 2011).

The detrimental impacts of producing animals either for food or clothing through the intensive industrial complex system have fuelled concerns around animal welfare. Such concerns are gradually persuading consumers to demand a shift in animal husbandry practices. In this vein, and regarding food, new animal welfare regulations are in place in the European Union countries encouraging consumers to be more aware of the way animals are produced in intensive farming. The most recent European survey on animal welfare practices reports that 94% of all Europeans find it to be important to protect the welfare of farmed animals, with Portugal being one of the countries gathering the highest percentages, together with Sweden and Finland (Eurobarometer 2015). Such concerns reflect wider values around sustainability, health, and fairness in the treatment of animals. One place to start making changes regarding animal welfare practices is the market. Indeed, it is important to put labelling mechanisms in place to inform consumers of the conditions and methods used in farmed animals.

Moreover, the dissemination of the idea that certain health problems that affect the rich countries (obesity, heart disease, type II diabetes, cancer) can be related to hectic lifestyles as well as unhealthy diets, has had an impact on the reduction of meat and dairy products consumption in some countries (Twine 2010, 127). As a result, new lifestyles and diets have emerged including the attention to compose more varied menus or, at an extreme, to reduce or remove animal protein from food diets by following vegetarianism or veganism.

## CONSTRUCTING ANIMALS: OBJECTIFICATION AND INVISIBILITY

According to Remy (2003), in an objectification process, the actor-human interacts with the animal, as if he/she were an object: the animal is not seen as a sensitive creature, but as an insensitive and passive one. In contrast, the subjectification process can be positive (when the animal is perceived as innocent) or negative (when the animal is seen as a threatening enemy who has to be treated with violence). However, the incidents linked to the act of killing reveal a negative subjectification. Even though the workers in a slaughterhouse recognize “the sensitive and intelligent nature” of the animal, they turn him/her into an object to facilitate the act of killing.

This suffering reality imposed on animals by human domination has been discussed by several authors, such as Isaac Bashevis Singer (2004), whose ideas inspired the historian Charles Patterson to write the controversial book *The Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust* (2002). Its main thesis is that human liberation cannot be disconnected from animal liberation. Humanism – as a speciesist philosophy, which built a hierarchical relationship favouring the superiority of the human, reducing animals to resources for the use of humanity – cannot resist its logical contradictions. That domination, as it started ten thousand years ago, at the dawn of agrarian societies, was the first form of hierarchical domination and the basis of all other forms of dominations such as patriarchy, slavery, war, genocide, and other systems of violence and power (Best 2007; Patterson 2002).<sup>1</sup> Even if the argument can be criticized, as hierarchical dominations existed long before agrarian societies, for example, the main point is the link between animal domination and other forms of power.

Based on the philosophical school of utilitarianism, in *Animal Liberation* (1975) Peter Singer develops the application of a principle of utility that consists of knowing if an act is ethical (right or wrong) checking if it implies a reduction of suffering and an increase of pleasure for the highest possible number of people. However, in developing his argument, the author intends to free himself from the prejudice of speciesism and, consequently, it becomes

1 In different fields, this approach is found in authors such as Marguerite Yourcenar (*That Mighty Sculptor, Time*, 1992) and J.M. Coetzee (*The Lives of Animals*, 1999), as well as philosophers such as Peter Singer (*Animal Liberation*, 1975) and Elisabeth de Fontenay (*Le Silence des Bêtes*, 1998), and also social scientists in the field of Critical Animal Studies (Nocella et al. 2014) compare the way of treating animals, in contemporary societies, to the Holocaust.

irrelevant if the object of the act is a human being or an animal. Rather, it becomes sufficient to refer to a sentient being (capable of feeling pleasure or pain), in order to validate the criterion. A large part of this book reveals how animals are treated by the human being in the livestock and entertainment industries, as well as in animal testing. These descriptions can be understood as the empirical foundation of his thesis. Furthermore, this classical book sets the foundations of the *Animal Rights Movement*, as it allowed a reflection and a well-founded debate about the moral status of animals, as well as the ethical evaluation of the values that encompass the practices of humans toward them.

In short, objectification is one of the main founding processes from which dominant representations of animals in Western societies derive. Invisibility, in its turn, is another one: animals' subjectivity – in the sense that they possess certain forms of “mental life” or individual sentient properties (as consecrated in the Cambridge Declaration of Consciousness (Low 2012) – are very frequently erased from collective understandings. And as the philosopher and ethologist Vinciane Despret (2002; 2008) claimed, the animal's intelligence could only be observed in the light of ethology and from the moment that appropriate questions began to be asked. The growing complexity of these scientific questions enabled a rising wonder with animals and their lives. This opened the way to acknowledge them as beings in their own right (Matignon 2013). In the first chapter of her book *Animal*, Erica Fudge (2002) discusses the visibility/invisibility of animals in our lives, as a question of recognition/misrecognition. To illustrate this idea, she tells us the story of Ham, a 4 year-old male chimpanzee sent by NASA in 1961 for a journey into space. His image, seen all over the world, led to misinterpretations. The baring of teeth by the little chimpanzee, so often interpreted as a radiant smile, was probably a real sign of aggression or even fear. Apes do not express their joy by laughing like human beings do and the conditions of such a trip for the small chimpanzee (in a situation of loneliness, confinement, uncertainty, and dependent on gradual doses of oxygen), were possibly not pleasant for that animal.

If one refuses the anthropomorphic image of the chimpanzee, what does this interpretation say about human beings? First, that humans prefer to look at this image as a smile of joy and pleasure as linked to his experience of travelling into space. Secondly, and more importantly, it shows willingness to ignore the differences between humans and animals (Fudge 2002, 26-27). The intellectual challenge proposed by the author is, hence, the following: how do the different ways we interpret animals influence the way we live with them



and the different status that we give them? But, most importantly, how is it possible that crucial issues of our relationship with animals are invisible?

One of the most interesting examples is that of food and clothes. For many, the most common interaction with animals happens when they eat them, or when they wear their skin or fur (DeMello 2012), as “objects” which are, in fact, dead parts of what used to be a living animal. During this objectification process, the animal as a living being disappears and becomes “meat”, “flesh”, or an “object”: sliced ham in a plastic package, a pair of shoes, or a fur coat (Fudge 2002, 26-27). In contemporary Western societies people do not eat animals; they eat “meat” (DeMello, 2012, 130). How does an animal become an object? How does an animal become “meat”? How can it be that the subjectivity of an animal disappears in the process?

Once an animal is considered edible, according to the cultural rules and especially the taboos of a particular society, it is important not to give him/her a name. This would create a personal relationship and the most important taboo, in general, is that we do not eat those who are close to us. One of the most distinct aspects of this objectification process is the way animals are treated within animal agribusiness, depriving them of their individuality. The invisibility and massification of all these animals is in high contrast when we consider the strong individualization of the same animals when they become pets (Williams and DeMello 2007).

## ANIMALS IN CHILDREN’S LIVES

Despite these processes of objectification and invisibility, animals are ubiquitously present in children’s lives and worlds and share with them a quite similar history of acceding rights.

Even if “children have an unsettled relationship with the status of citizenship” (Larkins 2014, 7), their provision and protection rights are recognized in contemporary western societies, despite the gap that very often exists between the rhetoric of principles and real childhood conditions. Nowadays, Nation States formally guarantee to all children, namely, the right to food, safety, health, education, and family wellbeing; the right to be protected from any form of discrimination or punishment based on race, colour, sex, language, and ethnic or social origin. Additionally, the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) brought to the scene the innovative notions of the

“superior interest of the child” and children’s participatory rights, which are far from being fully considered (even less practiced) in public policies or decision-making processes. But the CRC illustrates, as an international mandatory document, a relevant turning point in the dominant ways of perceiving generational relations or the child.

In fact, traditional representations of children view them as naturally immature, vulnerable, incomplete, emotional, and unready individuals – opposite to mature, competent, rational, and independent adults. Home was the right place for them to be, as they were denied (as many women) access to the public domain, where only men deployed instrumental and power skills. Back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, children were clearly in an inferior, dominated position, compared to their parents or educators; what is more, “maltreated children” (a new emergent category) were defended by pioneer charitable human rights organizations based on their “animal condition”, as the full human one seemed to be an adult exclusive (Almeida et al, 2001). However, the indoor/outdoor border became fuzzier when child labour in industrial Europe and later children’s massive schooling brought their public presence and economic contributions to society to the public fore. More recently, democratic values penetrated the “relational family” (Singly 2010): as literature reveals, children are affective partners in parental arrangements and a core centre of all family life.

Thereby, the historical process that conveyed children the right to share a full human condition with adults (while the citizen one is still partial or conditional) was the product of changing values in changing societies. Curiously, a quite similar social and scientific “visibility” turn has been increasingly operating with non-human animals. Left behind or in the shade for a long time in sociological thought, their ubiquitous presence is being progressively recognized within innovative theoretical frameworks, as well as their role in the fabric of social life. This is especially true amongst children.

Elaborating on the presence of animals in children’s lives, Cole and Stewart (2014), following a critical animal studies tradition, have explored the socialization process through which we teach children how to relate to animals. It operates along two main axes: sensibility and objectification. An emotional close connection with animals is encouraged in early ages (through fluffy soft toys, and cute representations in film characters and other elements of popular culture). However, as children are “coached” into boyhood and girlhood, and later, into adulthood, they are taught to create emotional and physical distance

from animals (including touch and physical proximity). Therefore, throughout the socialization process, the ways children look at animals and relate to them move from maximum sensitivity and minimum objectification, to minimum sensitivity and maximum objectification. This process is at the roots of what they call “the anthroparchal culture” (Cole and Stewart 2014, 28) – one that silently encourages the progressive desensitization toward animals, their objectification, and consequent transformation into objects of consumption. Even if contexts are not brought into discussion and socialization is reduced to a one-formula process, critical theory is an inspiring clue to problematize reality and formulate new research approaches.

From food to clothes, toys, books, and films, there would be a consistent process through which society manipulates the way children construct “other” animals, progressively creating a distance between human and non-human worlds by the increasing power of the former and instrumentalization of the latter. The authors detail their perspectives, considering different life stages.

Indeed, infants and toddlers’ food packaging (e.g., infant formula), clothes, and toys are commonly decorated with images of baby “pets” or “wild animals”, mixed with tender colours and symbols (e.g., love hearts). In toys, the promotion of child-animal affectivity and reciprocity is even greater through the soft materials used and a friendly and inviting body expression. This infantilized reproduction of animals promotes a relationship between children and animals as peers, in which objectification is, thus, minimal and sensitivity is high. But after a few months, still as toddlers or already as preschoolers, children are then socialized with cartoonized animal toys with much brighter colours and with colder and less responsive materials and designs. Nevertheless, animals are now much more articulated and sound effects and tactile surfaces are used, both in toys and books, to imitate nonhuman animals (e.g., farm animals like sheep, cows, or chickens). These characteristics continue to encourage children’s curiosity and friendliness with animals, especially “character animals” (such as Disney figures), while introducing the use one can make of them and the sense of difference between humans and non-humans. As animal toys become much more unarticulated, realistic, plastic, and anonymous, children and animals become more distant, and animals compete with other toys for children’s attention (e.g., cars, trains, science sets, or puzzles). The focus is then much more on the animal’s habitat and on a variety of natural and/or technological elements of it that, together with animal toys, are accessories with which children create scenarios

simulating reality in which the violence underlying the animal objectification is invisible. In this phase, the way children mechanically manipulate and even construct 3D animals transforms them into entertainment shows, diminishing the sensibility and increasing the distance and power toward “other” animals.

Regarding fictional literature, although the use of animals can be found since Greek and Roman civilizations (e. g., Aesop’s Fables), the emergence of animals in children’s stories dates back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century (with La Fontaine’s Fables), continuing throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the Victorian Era (e. g., Kipling’s *The Jungle Book*, 1984; Brunhoff’s *Histoire de Babar*, 1931). As in adult literature in which animals (*talking animals*) are frequently used to give voice to the more disadvantaged groups in society (e. g., women, the poor), in children’s books animals are mainly used as human models to teach/educate the reader. They may adopt either a humanized appearance (clothing, mannerisms, or language – anthropomorphization) or a realistic animal appearance while portraying high quality moral behaviours. The use of animals in children’s literature comes with the idea that children do not yet draw a clear division between the world of humans and non-humans, and therefore animals may have many different roles (friend, parents, and teachers), appearances, and behaviours. Following what is described as a *natural affinity between children and animals* – especially those that look like a little person (e. g., bears) – by reading about animals, children can easily *identify and empathize with animals* and, thus, develop their own identities as people and learn key social skills (DeMello 2012). Different species of animals, for example, are frequently used as a way to teach children diversity without mentioning ethnic stereotypes or to teach historic events during which groups of people were exploited, discriminated against, or killed (e. g., Holocaust – *The Terrible Things: An Allegory of the Holocaust*, 1989; Communism – *Animal Farm*, 1945).

But although promoting child-animal relationship in the early ages, when targeting older children, toys and children’s books tend to emphasize the separation between human and non-human worlds, namely by breaking up that close and meaningful relationship, as the child grows up, in the end of the story. Also, as a way to decrease the possible conflict that comes with the mixed conceptualization of animals as “friends” and as “food” (Morgan and Cole 2011), the acknowledgement of nonhuman animals’ instrumentalization in children’s books comes together with *idyllic images* of animal “farming” (Coats 1991).

Films and news media also help to disseminate animal's objectification, anthroparchal views, and the invisibility of exploitation and violence. For example, it is common that children's films associate the ideas of prosperity as good, and suffering as bad, whether characters "remain people" (are anthropomorphized) or are relegated to animal status (e.g., *Puss in Boots*, Cole and Stewart, 2014). News reports, while aiming to reflect public opinion, participate in shaping and forming those opinions by the visibility they give to the dominant discourse and by maintaining "strategic areas of silence" (slaughtering of nonhuman animals, Morgan and Cole 2011).

This socialization process intends to create a human state toward nonhuman animals that accepts a "*willed ignorance*" (Masson 2009) or rather *denial* to rectify acknowledged wrongdoing (Cohen 2001). Nevertheless, this result of accepting or ignoring this dissonance is not always straightforward.

#### EXPLORATORY FIELDS: CHILDREN, PETS, AND VEGANISM

We have explored so far how animals are constructed through discourses and practices developed by human adults, and passed on to children, throughout a hegemonic socialization process. Research is obviously needed to study, in different contexts, the consistency of these premises. Discourses, narratives, and images do not translate automatically into corresponding practices. Besides, children are not passive agents who would assimilate as *tabula rasae* adults' dominant ideas and ways of doing. Rather, they actively build their own worlds and daily life, negotiating rules and meanings with humans, and non-humans – including animals. We highlight two illustrative examples in which the companionship between children and animals becomes particularly visible: the importance of pets in children's lives; and the counter-hegemonic practices of veganism.

We choose these two examples not as the *only* paths for companionship between children and animals, but as illustrative cases that can contribute to developing our conceptual argument further and bring the relationship between children and animals to the forefront of the debate. Yet, from a critical animal studies perspective we can stumble on a first controversy with these examples: keeping a pet can be understood as an alignment with the reproduction of exploitative attitudes toward animals; on the contrary, veganism could illustrate the ultimate example of respectful attitudes toward

other animal species when there is a radical refusal to incorporate them through our mouths into our bodies (animal embodiment). Notwithstanding, in one case or in the other, children can illustrate new forms of unsettling the human centred perspective on animals.

#### PETS IN THE LIVES AND WORLDS OF CHILDREN

Before going any further, it is worth clarifying the meaning of *pet*. A pet is an animal who has been named, who is allowed to share the domestic space with humans, and who will never be eaten (De Mello 2012, 148; Fudge 2008, 15). When describing their personal and affective worlds, children spontaneously include not only their own pets, but also their relatives', friends', neighbours', and acquaintances', referring to both living *and* dead animals (Tipper 2011). So, one specific, and constitutive, aspect of children's experiences seems to be that knowing someone's pets is a very important and legitimate part of the experience of knowing that person, thus blurring the boundaries between people and (their) animals.

Moreover, children seem to feel highly competent and fully authoritative to speak about animals, particularly pets, than about other aspects of the world of adults. In part, this is linked to the importance of age as an organizer of norms that regulate children's relationship to the world around them, and also with animals. Thus, in their relationships with animals, children are not only negotiating human/non-human boundaries, but also adulthood/childhood boundaries, situating themselves in a relational axis in which power, knowledge, and authority are usually on the adult side. In this process, animals arise as an area in regard to which they feel particularly confident, with authority and proper knowledge (Tipper 2011).

Children also reveal awareness of their own agency toward pets, as when they describe their influence in adopting one (Tipper 2011). So, what children *do* in their daily lives is relevant to know the animals they live with: who they are, and the conditions they live in. This "practice approach" deconstructs developmental theories (such as Melson 2001) that focused mostly on the "functions" and roles of animals in children's lives, and therefore remained anthropocentric: in learning the "facts of life and death", to develop a sense of responsibility through caring practices, emotional competences, or any other skills that could be later used in the relationships with humans (Tipper 2011).

As Ingold (2013) and Haraway (2003) proposed, humans and animals are beings in the process of *becoming*, and all form of becoming is *becoming with*. Their actions toward each other are relevant to define them. In this sense, knowing the practices through which children and animals engage with one another is a way of understanding how they build, together, their common worlds and mutual understandings. In this sense, this discussion is better framed if animals are considered as *companions* in the lives of children, rather than pets – species with whom children develop *companionship* relations (Haraway, 2003), rather than stewardship relations based mainly on practices of *petting*. But how can we get to know the *practices of pets*? What are the *practices* of animals, and how do we get to know them? Drawing on Science and Technology Studies, Law and Miele (2011) defend that animals do not *pre-exist* the practices they are involved in. Rather, they are the relational effects of those practices, and *are being done* in the unfolding of actions. As such, different versions of the same animals can be enacted by different specific practices. Examples of these relationally emergent versions are the *animal-as-sentient-being*; or the *animal-as-an-infectious-agent*. “Animals are the heterogeneous material and relational consequences of specific and patterned ordering practices that extend beyond local scenes to include more or less distant times and places” (Law and Miele 2011, 62).

If we apply these arguments to the domestic space and to the relational practices between children and animals, then it is possible to begin to entangle the many-folded emergent versions of animals as pets, which are enacted through many different and specific domestic practices, in daily life; practices that are very heterogeneous, specific, and in which all participating elements engage in “bodily choreographies” (Law and Miele 2011), through patterned sets of relations; practices that intersect with spaces other than the household, such as school, other relatives’ homes, the neighbourhood, the mass media; with different times, such as memories of deceased pets, or; with several types of knowledge arrangements, such as veterinarians’ or paediatricians’. By approaching the uncertain, complex, and often incoherent ways in which all these intersect (Law and Miele 2011), we may begin to untangle the “relational emergent versions” of pets (such as *dog-as-sentient-being*, or *dog-as-emotional-support*). And because children’s relationships with animals are also contradictory, involving conflict and negative experiences and emotions, they also enact negative versions of pets: an example are *pets-as-dangerous-beings*, who bite and invade the child’s vital space.

## VEGANISM FOR CHILDREN: A COUNTER-HEGEMONIC CULTURE?

Notwithstanding the strength of hegemonic discourses and practices within the anthroparchal culture, some children are raised in contexts and practices of resistance. Veganism has been pointed out as an exemplary case of such counter-hegemonic cultures by prominent authors such as Cole and Stewart (2014). Their perspective is inspired by a “critical sociology” tradition and so they focus their general analysis on cultural products surgically selected. Examples are a well-known toy store in London, Hamleys, animated movies, television sitcoms, children’s stories and children’s books and, regarding the topic of vegan cultures, an analysis of books of vegan literature for children.

Given the deep implantation of the dominant meat culture in capitalist society, veganism occupies an unequal position, with many fewer resources and smaller scale. Nevertheless, its cultural products for children become powerful in both promoting new values of respect for other species, and empowering children who already embrace alternative vegan cultures (*ibid*).

Part of this power comes from the way in which veganism, and the cultural practices around it, reconfigure the ways human and non-human animals are defined. For instance, in vegan literature for children, humans are presented as having the potential to become compassionate toward other species, of coexisting peacefully with them. This ethical move, based on a value-oriented rationality, also brings a sense of human empowerment: humans, children or adults, “learn” to take “pleasure” out of contemplation of other animals’ beauty, freedom, and intra-species richness, rather than from consuming their bodies, fluids, or objectified representations. A move from “exploitation to wonder”; an ontological transformation with ethical consequences toward the non-human world (Cole and Stewart 2014).

At the same time, vegan culture reconfigures non-human animals, presenting them as sentient beings, with agency and subjectivity, and a rich intra-species relational and affective life, in which humans do not necessarily participate (let alone are indispensable to produce other animals’ emotional sides). They are depicted more in their peculiar physical characteristics (long tails), and less in anthropomorphic terms (big round eyes with tears, or smiley mouths). They also refer to the tension between confinement (imposed by humans) and freedom (their natural right), echoing other social minorities’ rights. In this, the role assigned to pets is not unanimous. While some representations advocate their exemplary status, as bearers of “role model”



attitudes toward non-human animals (“treat all animals like you treat your pets”), other critical approaches find it too risky: they argue that practices of pet-keeping are deeply entangled with anthroparchal culture, and thus may undermine the disruptive and emancipatory potential of veganism as a counter-culture (Cole and Stewart 2014, 161).

To the extent that animals are presented as sentient beings in their own right, rather than resources to be exploited, vegan culture thus constitutes an example of counter-hegemonic practices that have the potential to disrupt mainstream food practices. Knowing animals in their rich specificity makes it more difficult to objectify them, and consume them. Another important effect of vegan practices is to inspire younger consumers such as children to change food tastes in school, encouraging the inclusion of plant based diets in the school menus (Cardoso et al., chapter 12 in this volume). In recent years, there have been campaigns to include plant-based dishes on the school menus, where pulses, vegetables, and legumes feature as alternatives to animal protein. For example, a new policy measure is now in place in Portugal (Law n.º 11/2017) for the school year 2017/2018 that obliges the inclusion of a vegetarian option in all public canteens (prisons, schools, and elderly care centres). This is an opportunity to get children more familiar with plant-based foods, and develop a taste for vegetables instead of the prominent taste for meat.

Beyond dietary concerns, it is possible to relate the assumptions that underlie the vegan culture with environmental issues, such as deforestation, pollution, and species extinction. For instance, a large part of planetary deforestation is due to the production of soy, with the aim of feeding livestock in the meat industry (Twine 2010). Although a word of caution is needed to equate vegan diets with zero social and environmental impacts on the planet<sup>2</sup>, they have, notwithstanding, the potential to fuel a change of values and behaviours toward biocentrism, conceived as a network of interdependencies (Cole and Stewart 2014, 157); and the corresponding dismantling of anthropocentrism, based on a hierarchical model in which humans occupy the dominant position. The role of “vegan children” (Cole and Stewart 2014, 151) in this process is particularly illuminating of the weaknesses that, nevertheless, permeate the anthroparchal culture. Despite being subject to socialization processes that leave them little

2 See the BBC – Future article “What would happen if the world suddenly went vegetarian?” published on 27 September 2016, in which it is clear that a radical eradication of meat from eating habits would also have detrimental consequences for developing countries (see: <http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20160926-what-would-happen-if-the-world-suddenly-went-vegetarian>).

room to choose freely how to relate to non-human animals, there are children still managing to resist and develop alternatives. This raises the question of whether it is possible to enlarge their disruptive potential to other humans and the adult world. Research has shown how children are able to demand and to impose, at certain moments of their family life, alternative and meat-free diets at home (Cairns and Johnston 2018). According to these authors, this can trigger important family changes toward meat consumption but, at the same time, fuel new paradoxes and tensions in mothering practices (ethical concerns regarding intensive animal husbandry practices by demanding transparency of information displayed on food versus protecting children from *knowing too much* about the suffering of animals in intensive farming).

## CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter we present a critical reflection about the political project of sustainable development, discussing biased or excluded dimensions of the 17 SDGs. Two partners seem to be subsumed either as naturally vulnerable individuals (children) or are simply absent (non-human animals). Both share a condition of vulnerability that has, for long, put them on the side of nature (in a mind-set that opposes it to culture), as instinctive beings or, in the case of children, as unready manifestations of humanity.

Despite the power of the “anthropological machine” and the anthroparchal culture in the lives of children, some manage to build actively, through their daily practices, alternative ways of relating to animals. That is why we have argued that the relationships between children and animals are a gateway to understand the construction of alternative and more sustainable ways to relate to the planet. Animals are conspicuously present in the worlds of children. Through their joint daily practices, both contribute to enacting several different versions of animals *and* children: as-beings-to-be-protected; as-play-mates; etc.

Future research should pay attention to several dimensions engaged in these relationships: what and how children learn about animals; what happens to animals as a consequence of that; what children effectively do *with* animals, in their daily life; and the power of the affects and emotions involved in those practices to disrupt dominant practices and discourses. We have underlined two examples of the particular modes of relationship between children and animals: the importance of pets in children’s lives; and practices of veganism.

In this, we endorse a sociological perspective that aims at knowing how humans *look at* and *relate to* non-human animals, by including the latter as epistemological partners: a sociology *with* animals, rather than *about* them (anthropocentric perspectives) or *for* them (animal rights' activism perspectives) (Michalon, Doré and Mondémé 2016).

As such, children help us to problematize the concept of sustainability, so as to encompass non-human animals as legitimate companions and beings in their own right. For this, it is relevant to disrupt the humanist and speciesist legacy of sociology in general, and sustainable development in particular. Instead, it is necessary to propose a new goal for sustainable development that encompasses the agency of non-human animals. In this, we would be embracing a *biocentric* approach, and helping to challenge enduring anthropocentric assumptions in social sciences.

There is room for this intellectual project within the Sustainable Development debate. Authors such as Griggs et al. (2013) advocate a (re)definition of SDGs so as to include the security of people *and* the planet. Likewise, we argue that animals are major agents in this process, which are already there, but remain invisible. Unveiling their presence and importance is a key factor to achieve both people's and the planet's security and quality of life. As Griggs argues that both the protection of Earth's life support system *and* poverty reduction must be twin properties for SDGs, we argue for a more-than-human redefinition: comprising the needs of all human *and* non-human sentient beings, *and* their earthly life support systems, *and* all forms of reducing social inequalities.

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