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ORIGINAL PAPER

Particularizing Nonhuman Nature in Stakeholder Theory: The Recognition Approach

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Abstract

Stakeholder theory has grown into one of the most frequent approaches to organizational sustainability. Stakeholder research has provided considerable insight on organization–nature relations, and advanced approaches that consider the intrinsic value of nonhuman nature. However, nonhuman nature is typically approached as an ambiguous, unified entity. Taking nonhumans adequately into account requires greater detail for both grounding the status of nonhumans and particularizing nonhuman entities as a set of potential organizational stakeholders with different characteristics, vulnerabilities, and needs. We utilize the philosophical concept of 'recognition' to provide a normative underpinning for stakeholder theorizing on nonhuman nature in both universal and difference-sensitive terms. We discuss how the status model of recognition helps identify relevant nonhumans as organizational stakeholders, establish respect, and particularize nonhumans in their distinctiveness and in partner-like ways. The implications of the recognition approach for stakeholder research are explicated with an illustrative case that exemplifies the recognition and particularization of nonhuman nature. We contribute to stakeholder research on nonhuman nature by suggesting that recognition provides a conceptual tool for theorizing the stakeholder status and particularization of nonhuman nature. Thereby, this article reduces anthropocentric bias and increases the capacity of stakeholder theorizing to confront the challenges of the ecological crisis.

Keywords Nonhuman stakeholders · Anthropocentrism · Recognition

Introduction

Scientific information has evidenced alarming biodiversity decline, climate change, and ecosystem degradation (e.g., IPBES, 2019; Steffen et al., 2015). These challenges have generated research on the relationships between business organizations and the nonhuman world since the mid-1990s (Heikkurinen et al., 2016; Purser et al., 1995; Whiteman & Cooper, 2000; Winn & Pogutz, 2013). Within these endeavors, stakeholder theory has become a prominent approach to organizational sustainability studies (Hörisch et al., 2014; Schaltegger et al., 2019) and generated considerable research on the relationships between organizations and nonhuman nature (Driscoll & Starik, 2004; Laine, 2010; Starik, 1995; Tallberg et al., 2021; Waddock, 2011).

A stream of stakeholder research has explicated nonhuman nature (hereafter also 'nature' for simplicity)[1] as a stakeholder (Driscoll & Starik, 2004; Haigh & Griffiths, 2009; Roberts et al., 2021; Starik, 1995). This stream has sought to overcome the predominantly anthropocentric, normatively instrumentalizing orientation that depicts nonhuman nature primarily as a resource to enhance human and organizational well-being (Driscoll & Starik, 2004). Ethical approaches that go beyond anthropocentrism, such as ecocentrism (Starik, 1995; Vlasov, 2019), Gaia-centrism (Waddock, 2011) and ethics of care (Sama et al., 2004; Tallberg

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[1] Acknowledgeably, humans are also part of nature when the prefix 'nonhuman' is missing, but we focus on the relationships between organizations and nonhuman nature.

et al., 2021) have promoted the intrinsic value of nonhumans in stakeholder relationships. They have also criticized organizations' distancing from ecosystems and life-supporting foundations (Painter-Morland and ten Bos, 2016; Winn & Pogutz, 2013); distancing is further maintained by power-based stakeholder prioritizations (Sama et al., 2004). Notwithstanding the advancement of these contributions, more nuanced conceptualizations of nonhuman nature are still lacking, yet needed to identify how nonhumans' characteristics influence stakeholder relationships.

To address the lacuna, we offer the concept of recognition (Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Schlosberg, 2007) as a new normative underpinning for stakeholder theorizing on nonhuman nature. We explore how recognition helps perceive nonhumans as stakeholders and enables nonanthropocentric sensitivity for nonhuman characteristics. Recognition is a normative and analytical socio-philosophical concept that urges the socio-cultural valuing of nonhumans as they are and the moral consideration for their agency, integrity, and distinctiveness. Recognition also helps dismantle the value hierarchies (Fraser, 2009; Alamgir and Alakavuklar, 2020) and power structures that plague anthropocentric views (Ergene et al., 2018; Purser et al., 1995). Accordingly, the concept differs from the everyday sense of 'identification-like recognition.' Recognition concept has been previously applied to discuss the particularities of organizational actors (Pless & Maak, 2004; Alamgir and Alakavuklar, 2020) and embodied corporeality (Hancock, 2008). In environmental ethics, recognition has also been extended to the study of human–nonhuman relations (Hailwood, 2015; Kavalski and Zolkos, 2016; Laitinen & Kortetmäki, 2019; Schlosberg, 2007, 2014). Building on these insights, we develop new ways to approach nonhuman nature in stakeholder research. Our approach to nonhuman nature is critical realist: we acknowledge that nonhuman nature also exists independently of human constructions,[2] yet the human perceptions of it are socially constructed and interpreted through human-made categorizations which, actually, helps in particularizing nonhuman nature.

We offer the following contributions to stakeholder research on nonhuman nature. First, we introduce the recognition concept that urges respecting the intrinsic value of nonhumans and thereby provides an integrity-grounded normative claim for acknowledging nonhumans as organizational stakeholders. Integrity promotes an ecologically informed understanding for approaching nonhumans respectfully. Second, recognition advances the particularization of nature into distinct kinds of nonhuman individuals, collectives, and systems as organizational stakeholders. Particularization is based on recognition as socio-cultural respect where the particular lifeways and needs arising from differences are taken into account respectfully rather than valued inferiorly (Fraser & Honneth, 2003). We extend non-anthropocentric stakeholder theorizing on nonhumans and argue that particularization advances theorizing by enabling the inclusion of various kinds of nonhumans in a context-sensitive way. We join recent discussions on nonhuman agency (Heikkurinen et al., 2021; Tallberg et al., 2021), and argue that more attention to integrity is needed to understand the normative implications of recognizing nonhuman stakeholders. Third, we contribute to stakeholder theory by proposing an alternative to the anthropocentric approaches in stakeholder theory. As an established approach in organization studies, probing the boundaries of stakeholder theory is an important and much needed task to make the organizational research more sensitive to nonhuman matters (Starik & Kanashiro, 2013; Winn & Pogutz, 2013).

Our examination proceeds as follows. We first discuss previous research on nonhuman stakeholders and organization–nature relationships. Second, we turn to recognition literature to construct our approach for recognizing and particularizing nonhumans as stakeholders. Third, we apply the concept of recognition to an illustrative case on ecosystem restoration. Lastly, we discuss contributions, implications, and future research needs.

Nonhuman Nature in Stakeholder Relationships

Stakeholder research has studied organization–nature relations from descriptive, instrumental, and normative aspects[3] and advanced two approaches: nature as a stakeholder, and nature as a shared concern among human stakeholders

[2] By the possibility to exist independently from humans, we refer to the fact that while for example forest and mire ecosystems in the present world are actually impacted by human activities, a world without humans would also have forest and mire ecosystems, even if they were not identical with the presently existing ones that have been impacted by humans. Domesticated animals, in contrast, could not exist without humans bringing them into existence. Regarding nonhuman categories: Considering both individuals and collectives as relevant subjects in research has a long-standing history in environmental social theory, even if demarcating the boundaries of collectives is not straightforward (see Dryzek, 2013). The human–nonhuman distinction is necessary to the analytical approach taken and to evaluate the actions of particular human collectives (organizations). This analytical distinction does not assume or suggest an ontological dichotomy where humans would not be a part of nature.

[3] 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). We follow here the integrative version of the theory.

(Schaltegger et al., 2019). The former posits that nature fulfils the criteria of 'stakeholderness' due to its physical, legal, socio-emotional and ethical characteristics (Driscoll & Starik, 2004; Starik, 1995; Tallberg et al., 2021) and its capacity "to affect and be affected" by organizational activities (Freeman, 1984, p. 46). The latter maintains that nature cannot articulate its stakes (without a human voice) and cannot therefore have a stakeholder status (Näsi et al., 1998; Orts & Strudler, 2002; Phillips & Reichart, 2000).

The debate regarding the stakeholder status of nonhuman nature, however, remains at the level of considering nature in genericized terms. While the notion of nonhuman nature as *a* stakeholder has since been advanced in many respects and the stakeholder literature has utilized varied understandings of nature (Laine, 2010), the particularization of nonhuman*s* as stakeholder*s* has hardly received attention. Nature is often approached as a whole, "in the singular" (Haigh & Griffiths, 2009, p. 348), akin to if society was approached as a stakeholder in its whole. This provides little guidance for managers to identify nonhumans as stakeholders with particular interests or stakes (Phillips & Reichart, 2000). For *particularizing* views of nature, Starik's landmark article (1995) is worth noting. Starik depicts nature as genericized and specified stakeholders. The former is an all-encompassing planetary system, and the latter comprises "single nonhuman species, subspecies, communities, or even individuals" (Starik, 1995, p. 215). Hence, organizational actors need "to *particularize* the many entities that constitute the natural environment" (Starik, 1995, p. 215, emphasis in original). Recent exceptions endorsing the need for particularization are worth noting here. Roberts et al. (2021) suggest (grounding their argument in deep ecology) that species are stakeholders; however, they focus on operationalizing and measuring this status. Winn and Pogutz (2013) have advanced particularization with ecological concepts such as ecosystems and biodiversity. The recent particularization of animal stakeholders (e.g., Tallberg et al., 2021) and of place-based materialities for ecocentric stakeholder management (Araujo et al., 2021) demonstrate how the particularization of nonhuman nature is required to understand the specificities of the various relationships between organizations and nonhumans, and their normative implications: for example, relationships to climate change, river ecosystems, wolves, and dog individuals, are different from each other, and so are their normative implications.

The identification and balancing of stakeholder interests is at the core of stakeholder analysis (Freeman, 1984; McVea & Freeman, 2005; Phillips & Reichart, 2000) and presents a challenge to theorizing on nonhumans as stakeholders. Attempts to identify the interests of nature have been scarce since Starik (1995, p. 216) who proposed that nature's potential stakes involve "the continuation of evolution, the preservation of species, habitats, and systems, and humane treatment of individual nonhuman living entities." While these generic stakes initiate further considerations, the interests of nature are context-dependent, varied, and in constant transformation, as human ones (McVea & Freeman, 2005). Thus, the so far meager particularization of nature is important for considering the nonhuman stakes. The position that nature is inarticulate (Näsi et al., 1998; Orts & Strudler, 2002) would mean that only human intermediaries or proxy stakeholders can express nature's stakes (Phillips & Reichart, 2000). This may lead organizations to manage organization intermediary, rather than organization–nature, relationships (Haigh & Griffiths, 2009).[4] The intermediary view, nevertheless, easily misses the complexity of life (Sama et al., 2004). The assumed 'silence' of nature has also been contested by suggesting that nature has a voice: it 'speaks'—not with human words but through numerous interactions and events, even diseases, to the extent that nature cannot be 'silenced' like humans can (Dryzek, 2002).[5] Consequently, nature's expressivity is a matter of humans' capacity to listen to and interpret its communication and ecological semiotics (Dobson, 2014; Romero & Dryzek, 2020; Whiteman & Cooper, 2011). While listening to nonhuman signals does not make humans able to fully step beyond the 'human perspective,' it may nevertheless significantly improve understanding about and sensitivity to the otherness while accepting its fundamental difference (Hailwood, 2015).

The genericizing and anthropocentric tones in stakeholder theory, and more broadly in organization studies, have invoked criticism. The environmental ethics inspired strands of contributions have argued for the noninstrumental, intrinsic value of nonhuman nature. Nonanthropocentric contributions, notably drawing on ecocentrism, have paid attention to the normative valuation and status of nonhumans (e.g., de Figueiredo & Marquesan, 2022; Heikkurinen et al., 2016; Purser et al., 1995; Starik, 1995) as well as the ways in which we humans can listen to, and try to respectfully interpret, nonhuman signals and agency (e.g., Heikkurinen et al., 2021; Preston & Antonsen, 2021; Romero & Dryzek, 2020; Vlasov, 2019). The critique for the hierarchical dualisms retained in human/nonhuman and organization/nature relationships (e.g., Allen et al., 2019; Phillips, 2019; Sayers et al., 2021) has been echoed by stakeholder scholars drawing on, for example, a Gaia-centric perspective (Waddock, 2011) and ethics of care (Sama et al., 2004; Tallberg et al., 2021). The typical stakeholder identification and

[4] This problem has been suggested resolvable by distinguishing between human representatives for nature and nature itself (Driscoll & Starik, 2004).

[5] Many of these interactions also originate from human–nature relations (for example, the mad cow disease and climate change induced storms).

prioritization models, such as stakeholder salience (Mitchell et al., 1997), have been critiqued for valuing the most powerful or strategically most significant stakeholders and, consequently, paying little or no attention to nature (Driscoll & Starik, 2004; Haigh & Griffiths, 2009). One central reason for this is that while some stakeholder interests are more readily measurable and quantifiable, environmental claims and values are often qualitatively different (and difficult to measure) for they relate to the quality of the environment, ecological integrity, and conditions of existence and well-being (Sama et al., 2004). Also, they are difficult to capture without sufficient particularization. These reasons highlight the importance of acknowledging nonhumans on their own terms and nonhuman agency as constitutive to organization–nature relationships (see also Preston & Antonsen, 2021, p. 28). Overall, research drawing from environmental ethics has generated understanding of the mutual influence and embeddedness of organization–nature relationships (Allen et al., 2019; Heikkurinen et al., 2016; Waddock, 2011; Winn & Pogutz, 2013). We continue along these lines, taking the explorations of nonhuman stakeholders in organization–nature relationships further.

Recognition: Toward a Sensitive and Respectful Particularization of Nonhuman Nature

Recognition is used as an analytical lens in social and political theory to examine how recognitive practices enable social cohesion, constitute respectful relationships and support healthy self-relations, and how misrecognition creates socio-cultural patterns of oppression (e.g., Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Honneth, 1996). Social movements claim for recognition when they urge for the equal standing and institutional recognition of various cultural and indigenous groups and of more respectful interaction in the society (e.g., Fraser & Honneth, 2003).[6] Recognition perspective highlights the relational nature of organizational life, with particular emphasis on the embodied and ethical aspects of interaction (Hancock, 2008; Islam, 2012). Misrecognition (as denial of recognition) manifests, for example, in human resource management practices that reduce workers into quantitative units of effectiveness or human capital (Islam, 2012). Recognition also highlights the importance of taking differences into account in organizational life. Alamgir and Alakavuklar (2020) point out how the genericization of women workers merely as 'workers' in the Bangladesh apparel industry is misrecognitive by concealing differentiated vulnerabilities and needs. Instead, recognition necessitates respect for differences and more inclusive diversity in organizational cultures (Pless & Maak, 2004). The value of recognition as a conceptual framework[7] in business ethics relates to its ability to examine stakeholder relations in the conditions of increasing diversity among collaborating actors (Pless & Maak, 2004), to question the dominant stakeholder approaches and normalized framings that perpetuate instrumentalizing and subjugating behavior (Islam, 2012; Alamgir and Alakavuklar, 2020), to highlight the embodiedness of interactions (Hancock, 2008), and to discuss how 'impartial' (difference blind) practices may reproduce subjugating power relations (Alamgir and Alakavuklar, 2020).

The recognition of nature has also received notable attention in recent years (e.g., Hailwood, 2015; Laitinen & Kortetmäki, 2019; Romero & Dryzek, 2020; Schlosberg, 2007, 2014), which demonstrates a shift away from the previously anthropocentric orientation in social and political theory. While the organizations and stakeholder research is yet to discuss the recognition of nature, some of the existing ideas point toward similar thinking. These include ecological embeddedness and a positive belief in ecological reciprocity and respect (Whiteman & Cooper, 2000) and taking nature respectfully into account in stakeholder relationships through the care-based and noninstrumentalizing organization–nature relations (Sama et al., 2004; Tallberg et al., 2021). Driscoll and Starik (2004, p. 62) suggest that the development of multiple human–nature relations will lead more organizations to "explicitly recognize the stakeholder status of nonhuman nature." These examples call for examining how recognition could help understand and address nature in stakeholder theorizing.

Recognition studies employ two differently focused approaches: the intersubjectivist / personhood-oriented and the status-oriented (Laitinen & Kortetmäki, 2019; Zurn, 2003). The intersubjectivist approach emphasizes intersubjective relations between humans: the mutual recognition as confirmation of the personhood of others (and ourselves) is constitutive of social life and self-relations (Honneth, 1996). This social ontological[8] frame or theory is applicable in organizational ethics (Hancock, 2008; Islam, 2012)

[6] Recognition in the way we use is different from 'ethical issue recognition' that merely refers to the *identification* of an issue as ethically relevant.

[7] Axel Honneth's theory of intersubjective recognition comprises a comprehensive whole often referred to as a theory of recognition; other approaches to recognition, such as the status-based approach we focus on, are better considered as analytical and normative frameworks (compatible with different theories), not theories in themselves.

[8] Ontology as a scientific inquiry concerns the nature of existence: how the things and processes we perceive in the world actually exist. Ontological frames, thus, are frames that somehow contribute to describing and understanding the existential aspect of reality, for example how the things and processes exist in the world and in relation to each other.

yet its focus on personhood-related capacities and reciprocal recognition excludes most human–nature relations (Schlosberg, 2007).

The status-oriented model of recognition represents a social scientific perspective: recognition is an analytical tool for exploring the hierarchical, institutionalized socio-cultural patterns of denigration and subjugation (Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Zurn, 2003). Recognition studies use this normative framework[9] to address how the socio-cultural constituents of a society influence the relational status of its members and their opportunities to realize their life plans and interact with other community members.[10] Recognition as socio-cultural status equality that manifests in institutionalized practices (hereafter 'recognition') does not require the recipients of recognition to have psychological experiences about (mis)recognition. Thus, it is more inclusive to the different forms of nonhuman existence and fit for studying human–nonhuman relations in social and political theory, directing attention in those socio-cultural patterns that perpetuate the exploitation of nature and deny nonhuman integrity (Schlosberg, 2007). This is an important expansion: while the intersubjective model of recognition also questions value hierarchies that devalue the voices differing from the dominant logic (Pless & Maak, 2004), it also, ironically, delimits this criticality to the human sphere, entrenching human/nature dualism and the depiction of nature as a voiceless background (cf. Hailwood, 2015).

Misrecognition is socio-cultural discrimination that attributes an inferior status to certain groups due to their biological, physiological, or social–historical characteristics. Misrecognition emerges in institutionally anchored and systematically subordinating cultural value patterns (Zurn, 2003, p. 522; see also Pless & Maak, 2004) and realizes in everyday interactions and organizational practices, putting misrecognized ones constantly in a disadvantaged position. Nonhumans are misrecognized when the value hierarchies deny or neglect their autonomy and integrity or systematically pose them as inferior: for example, when

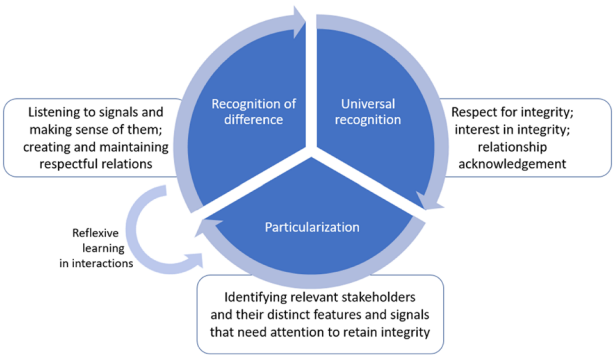

Fig. 1 The cycle of recognition in organizational activities

nonhuman otherness is disparaged (Hailwood, 2015), or when human–nature interactions are dominated by profit-seeking (Schlosberg, 2007, p. 140). Recognition, in turn, requires valuing nonhumans as they are and granting them a nonmarginalizing status as equals in constantly evolving human–nonhuman interactions, accompanied by adequate normative regard and respect that rejects the default prioritization of human interests.

Universal Recognition: Respect for Integrity

Status recognition involves two aspects: universal recognition, grounded in what 'we' (all who can be given recognition) have in common; and the recognition of difference, nonhierarchical attitude to and regard for how 'we' are different (Hancock, 2008; Pless & Maak, 2004). The two aspects of recognition have a cyclical relationship to each other, and particularization is needed as an 'intermediary step' to proceed from universal recognition to the recognition of difference. Figure 1 demonstrates these cyclical relations that are discussed in greater depth in the sections that follow.

Universal recognition basically means equal respect that is closely tied to the institutionalized granting of recognition, such as universal human rights and equal dignity (Fraser & Honneth, 2003). The universal recognition implies equal respect and valuation for the integrity of nonhuman entities, recognizing "that there is more to the nonhuman than its (potential) place in the human landscape" (Hailwood, 2015, p. 143). Which of the features that 'we have in common' justify—and even demand—universal recognition beyond humans?

Literature on the recognition of nature grounds universal recognition in integrity, a subcategory of agency in its broad sense. Many environmental ethicists and political theorists criticize narrow, anthropocentric definitions of agency that require intentionality. Nonhuman capacities of interacting in

[9] Contrary to the intersubjective model of recognition, the politically oriented status model does not presume or construct a particular ontological frame. As a normative framework, it is a conceptual framework that is grounded on a particular set of premises (some normative, some descriptive) and involves normative claims regarding how states of affairs should be (i.e., that the equal recognition of the members of a community is morally right and that misrecognition is morally wrong). It is possible, however, that the expansion suggested by the idea of recognizing nature actually invokes a demand for developing the status model of recognition into an ontological frame; we will discuss this later.

[10] Status in this sense differs from the Weberian 'status' as a matter of honor and worth judgments, which is also used to explain stakeholder salience (Mitchell et al., 1997). Egalitarian status is possible and normatively desirable in the recognition approach but impossible in the Weberian framework (Zurn, 2003, p. 522).

the world are denied if agency is assumed to require human qualities and a conventional understanding of agency (Tallberg et al., 2021). In a broad view, all entities that exercise interaction and causation have some agency (e.g., Bennett, 2010; Dobson, 2014; Romero & Dryzek, 2020). These remarks call for widening the typically anthropocentric perspectives to agency (see also Heikkurinen et al., 2021). A/biotic signals also demonstrate the material rootedness of agential relations, even of those relations that are communicative or attitudinal like recognition (Laitinen & Kortetmäki, 2019). Organizational activities, too, always have a material basis that must be taken into account (Allen et al., 2019; Heikkurinen et al., 2016) and has ontological implications on stakeholder theorizing.

The broad meaning of agency successfully 'derails' thinking from anthropocentric, ontologically biased tracks, but does not alone ground recognition as an institutionalized form of equal moral respect. Even environmentalists consider that certain agential things do not warrant moral consideration for their own sake but can be approached instrumentally (consider falling rocks, life-threatening pathogens, or increased atmospheric greenhouse gas impacts). Thus, the notion of integrity is needed to determine the recognition-relevant subcategory of agency.[11] Integrity is the capacity of a *living* entity to maintain itself in the face of external forces, even if it is never isolated from others (Heyd, 2005); or to exercise self-regulative, self-corrective, and developmental capacities (Schlosberg, 2007, p. 136), which also reminds that entities with integrity often change over time. Integrity is a notion with an established role in ecological studies (cf. Westra, 2016), which makes it possible to link integrity discussions with empirical information on various nonhumans and ecological systems. Integrity calls for paying attention to the quality of the human–nonhuman relationships (Preston & Antonsen, 2021; Sama et al., 2004; see also Heikkurinen et al., 2016 on autonomy).[12] A living entity with integrity can be harmed: human activities can harm individuals, ecosystems, species, and populations (e.g., Schlosberg, 2014; Westra, 2016) whereas climate change or machines are not *harmed* in a similar sense. Human activities and technology can also contribute to the creation of nonhuman entities with full integrity. The extent to which human activity has influenced the emergence of an entity is not determining for its later integrity (the same goes for human babies who are also created by other humans yet become full-fledged autonomous individuals). Thus, integrity does not require distinguishing human-made or human-modified living entities from others; it is the capacity to life, interaction, and self-regulation that matter.

Because universal recognition concerns all who share certain features, institutions are central for its mediation. For example, the EU constitutional treaty establishes the moral status of sentient animals, stating that "the Union and the Member States shall, since animals are sentient beings, pay full regard to the welfare requirements of animals" (Treaty of Lisbon, 2009). However, the treaty is controversial regarding the use of animals in cultural traditions and industrial food production. A more ambitious example is the Ecuadorian constitution that grants rights to nonhuman nature. From the viewpoint of recognitive stakeholder relations, noninstitutionalized form of universal recognition denotes respect for the integrity of nature. Such a respect calls for acting in ways that retain the nonhuman world's 'essential characteristics' (Heyd, 2005)[13] or functioning, that is, integrity (Schlosberg, 2014). Thus, the universal recognition makes a normative call for considering and listening to nonhumans as stakeholders, but falls short of providing answers for the appropriate ways to do that. That is where particularization and the recognition of difference makes the difference.

Recognition of Difference: Distinctive Features

The recognition of difference, another aspect of status recognition, entails that nature cannot be sufficiently recognized as a whole (universal recognition); that would neglect its diversity. Recognition of difference requires equal respect and standing (noninferior status) for any one, *regardless* of one's distinctiveness from others (for this discussion in business ethics, see Pless & Maak, 2004; Alamgir and Alakavuklar, 2020). Misrecognitive devaluation may stem from various biological, physiological, or social historical distinctive characteristics (Bader, 2007). Nonhuman nature is misrecognized in its differences when its own distinct ways of existence are denigrated, devalued, or undermined by human domination, or when nature is considered only in a genericized way. Recognition of difference requires regard for those features that make nonhumans what they

[11] We continue to refer to agency as well, because different literature strands use different terms and the idea about agency (emphasizing acting) may resonate more with some readers. Agency is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the entity to merit recognition as status equality: forest fires, for example, merit the cognitive and strategic acknowledgment of their agency that cannot be overlooked.

[12] The step from human–nature to organization–nature relationships in stakeholder theorizing is, in our view, relatively straightforward: we assume that organizational activities regarding stakeholder management involve a socially constructed dimension where humans are the actors who reflect upon, decide about, and enact stakeholder management, either individually or collectively, and in this way realize stakeholder relations (even if those relations are also materially embedded).

[13] We acknowledge the contestability of 'essential.'

are (*non*humans) and define their species-typical 'ways of being' and related needs and vulnerabilities.

The recognition of difference can concern individuals, ecological systems, and collectives (such as species populations) who are particular and irreplaceable (Heikkurinen et al., 2016 call this *uniqueness*). Biological particularity is enabled by the universal self-regulative and self-sustenance capacities (integrity) and does not mean any fixed state. An ecosystem maintains integrity and identity as a particular ecosystem despite gradual changes, such as adaptation or succession, but loses integrity when humans transform it into something totally different—for example, a rainforest into a cropland—so that it can no longer self-restore its rainforest-like functions (Cumming & Collier, 2005).[14]

In stakeholder management, the recognition of difference is preceded by particularization (also called for by Starik, 1995) where relevant stakeholders for the given organizational activity are identified and their distinct features are given consideration. *Not* particularizing nature is misrecognitive by keeping nonhuman distinctiveness largely invisible (Schlosberg, 2007, p. 140). Hiding the more specific nonhuman groups is one aspect of power use. Particularization resonates with particularizing human relationships into 'names and faces' in stakeholder management, instead of generic categories based on economic roles (McVea & Freeman, 2005; Crane & Ruebottom, 2011; Alamgir and Alakavuklar, 2020). Particularizing nonhumans necessitates diverse scientific knowledge, accompanied by ecological sensemaking to attend to and understand context-specific ecological conditions and changes (Tryggestad et al., 2013; Whiteman & Cooper, 2011). 'Listening to nature' and making sense of its signals also means constant learning and interpretation that is not only crucial for recognition but creates a feedback loop (see Fig. 1) to the particularization: for example, there may be new information about nonhuman species/populations or interspecies interactions that are influenced by organizational activities, in which case the recognition of difference requires the consideration of whether and how this information should influence the current activities. For example, new findings about the presence of endangered species, or new knowledge about the welfare requirements of animals influenced by organizational activities, may significantly call for re-identifying the set of relevant stakeholders and changing the organizational practices. The emergence of a nonhuman party as a result of knowledge and sensemaking is exemplified by the 'emergence of moor frogs' at a construction site, examined by Tryggestad et al. (2013). Water holes on the ground were first insignificant to the land developer firm but as a result of expert and environmentalist knowledge, they became to signify the presence of protected moor frogs, which in turn required the redefinition of construction and development practices in the area – giving rise to many contestations.

While recognition demands willingness to learn about nonhuman others in detail, it neither requires nor suggests knowing 'the Other' inside out: respectful recognition is possible with partial knowing and 'basic estrangement' (Hailwood, 2015; Nygren & Jokinen, 2013). Similarly, respectful multicultural city life implies recognitive coexistence with strangers whose cultural expressions one does not share or fully understand (Young, 1990, p. 241). Human actors in organizations do not need to fully understand nonhuman others but can still recognize them as intrinsically valuable beings participating in the same interaction networks (cf. Heikkurinen et al., 2021) and sharing the same material space.

In summary, the recognition of nature rejects anthropocentric value hierarchies. Recognized nonhuman life is valued as meriting equal consideration in stakeholder relationships. This does not make *all* nonhumans stakeholders (cf. Driscoll & Starik, 2004). What about natural environment *as a whole?* It clearly influences organizational activities: companies must acknowledge the material foundations provided by the environmental processes (Allen et al., 2019; Driscoll & Starik, 2004; Winn & Pogutz, 2013) and planetary boundaries, the ultimate limits of safe operating space for humanity (Heikkurinen et al., 2021; Steffen et al., 2015).[15] Natural environment as a whole has agential capacities but we do not see it as a stakeholder in the normative sense implied by recognition. Rather, natural environment as a whole sets limits that, unlike stakeholder interests, are non-negotiable (see also Orts & Strudler, 2002; Phillips & Reichart, 2000).

Recognition provides a normative grounding for acknowledging agency, integrity, and distinctiveness as recognition-evoking features of nonhuman nature (Table 1). Relevant stakeholders emerge from this 'universe' of potential stakeholders, depending on the type of organizational activity in question, and learning and listening involved in the recognition of difference might yield new information to identify new stakeholders.[16]

[14] There are various definitions for identity; we use the one (Cumming & Collier, 2005) that is meaningful for considering ecological dynamics. Moreover, this conception of identity does not assume some 'ideal nature' that exists without humans, although extensive human impact can destroy the identity of an ecological system.

[15] We do not claim that this would be sufficient; planetary boundaries is also an anthropocentric concept if the notions for safe actions are defined based on what is safe from the viewpoint of human societies (such conditions on the earth may also be lethal or dangerous to many nonhuman life forms).

[16] Humans also possess Table 1 features and are thus included in the universe of potential stakeholders who merit recognition. Yet, we focus here on nonhumans. Humans may also have additional features (such as personhood) with further normative implications for stakeholder relations.

Table 1 Recognition-evoking features of nonhuman nature (Hailwood, 2015; Schlosberg, 2007)

Recognition-evoking features	Definition
Agency	Agency is a characteristic of all entities that can exercise some interaction and causation
Integrity	Having functionings that enable a living entity or system to self-direct, self-develop, and self-correct itself
Distinctiveness	A compilation of features that explains why entity is the kind of entity it is; many of such features are based on biological and ecological characteristics in the case of nonhuman entities. Grounds particularization

The acknowledgment of the features in Table 1 has ontological, normative, and epistemic aspects. Acknowledging agency makes the organizational ontology materially embedded (Allen et al., 2019; Heikkurinen et al., 2016) and calls for acknowledging the ecological hierarchies in how life is organized (cf. Heikkurinen et al., 2021). Acknowledging integrity invokes the normative claim for the rejection of anthropocentric value hierarchies and for the inclusion of nonhumans as stakeholders in a normatively relevant sense. Acknowledging distinctiveness urges gathering information, making sense of, and learning about those particular nonhumans that are relevant in the given organizational context. Related knowledge is time- and culture-specific and dependent on the available tools, practices, and frames. No method for obtaining knowledge is safe from human biases. However, the utilization of scientific knowledge while making it more diverse, for example inclusive of nonanthropocentric and non-Western views, helps reduce biases. Particularization warrants most attention when organizations have highly impactful direct relationships with nonhumans, as our illustrative case demonstrates.

Recognizing Nonhuman Nature: An Illustrative Example

Next, we discuss urban stream restoration to illustrate the importance and implications of recognition and particularization of nonhuman stakeholders in organization–nature relationships. Urban streams that flow through densely populated areas are predominantly degraded ecosystems. Ecological restoration projects aim to revive their integrity and vitality: a common goal is to remove the underlying sources of degradation to allow the ecosystem to recover on its own.[17] This takes time and requires human facilitation (Booth et al., 2016; Palmer et al., 2014), involving various organizations and human and nonhuman individuals and collectives.

The process of recognition can be followed with recognition-guiding questions we have summarized in Table 2, based on the exploration conducted in the previous sections of this paper. The primary question raised for recognition is: What realizes respectful, noninstrumentalizing relationship with nonhumans in this case?The lacking or weak integrity of a degraded urban stream ecosystem makes it a 'system-to-be' entity (see Table 2) until it reaches sufficient integrity for functioning as an ecosystem of its kind.[18] We suggest that restored ecological integrity counts as the core interest of a 'system-to-be' entity such as the degraded stream, because integrity is the foundation for full system functioning. Restorative measures incrementally help the ecosystem reach structure and functionings, and its integrity including the capacity to evolve, reassemble, and adapt (Gann et al., 2019; cf. Schlosberg, 2007, p. 137 on integrity). Integrity does not imply a fixed state: ecosystems continue to change over time. Therefore, supporting the ecological integrity of a stream also implies leaving space for its migration over time.

The facilitation of integrity is deemed important in the international, scientifically informed ecological restoration principles (Gann et al., 2019). Humans and businesses doing restoration should support and facilitate, rather than control, restorative processes. This draws attention to the implication of universal recognition as nondomination: recognition invokes the argument that business should not control but value nature as collaborative stakeholders whose agencies are considered (Preston & Antonsen, 2021). The focus shifts from managing stakeholders to creating reciprocal relationships (Hörisch et al., 2014). The stream ecosystem is not just a recipient of operative outcomes from organization–nature interactions but actively engages in them, hence becoming a partner.[19] Thus, a recognitive relationship must

[17] Although ecological restoration involves ethical challenges because it intervenes with nonhuman agency (see Heyd, 2005), it should be noted that a case for restoration emerges only some aspects of agency have already been degraded or lost.

[18] While individuals' early developmental stages also manifest undeveloped integrity, that is a necessary part of any individual lifespan and these beings naturally develop into the state of full integrity if not disrupted. Thus, individual immaturity it is different from the 'to-be' stage that is caused by a system's degradation.

[19] We adhere to the literature that speaks of partnership-like relations between humans and nonhuman nature without assuming a consensual understanding where a partner would need to be able to articulate consent. Thus, our understanding of partnerships is nonanthropocentric.

Table 2 What realizes respectful, noninstrumentalizing organization–nature relations? Guiding questions for recognition

Stakeholder features	Nonhuman individuals (sufficiently complex)	Nonhuman collectives, including communities and ecosystems	Nonhuman 'systems-to-be' whose integrity is restored
Agency, integrity	What kind of business context is in question: what kinds of nonhumans may be impacted by business or may become partners in related interactions? How is nonhuman agency and integrity present in the given business context?		
Distinctiveness	How to show respect for integrity, instead of approaching individuals as interchangeable units or 'mass'?	What are the essential features of the collective? What actions would disrupt its integrity?	How to respect and protect the emerging agency and integrity in the making?
Particularizing features (examples)	*Signals:* how to listen to this being's signals (what are they like)? *Relations:* how to respect species-typical behavior and its realization? *Specific features:* (e.g., sentience) What actions would inflict suffering on nonhumans and how to avoid them?	*Signals:* How to foster ecological sensemaking in the given context? What do ecological sciences convey about collectives' vulnerabilities: how to be sensitive to them? *Relations:* How to interact with an ecosystem so that its nonhuman inhabitants can lead their ways of life?	*Signals:* How can we be sensitive to the signals of the to-be-restored system? Who are the best ones to make sense of it? *Partners:* Which partnerships support resilience and integrity in the making? How will restoration support nonhuman flourishing?

also balance with a wider spectrum of temporalities than what organizational interests alone would suggest. Due to the available technology, the organizational actors have the power to prioritize their short-term interests by making restorations quickly and effectively as one-time events. However, managing uncertainty and multiple ecological temporalities requires even decades-long monitoring and periodic attention based on adaptive management sensitive to biotic response and long-term interests of the ecosystem (restored integrity). One aspect of a recognitive relationship is to not use the excessive power one could have over nonhumans via technological means; another is to see broadly the whole spectrum of temporalities and create circumstances for experimental learning. This involves challenging the human-oriented linearity in time and paying attention to the cyclical temporality inherent in ecosystem dynamics, and acknowledging the stakes of species that relate to the 'relatively permanent' survival in the restored habitat, in contrast to the short presence of the business organization (Tryggestad et al., 2013).

Feminist stakeholder theorizing has noted that humans and animals *jointly create value in* their relationships (Tallberg et al., 2021). This also holds true beyond animals: joint value creation in ecological restoration takes place via various human–nonhuman and nonhuman–nonhuman interactions. Acknowledging joint value creation increases consciousness about the interrelatedness of stakeholders: neither humans nor nonhumans alone could create the end results. Urban stream restoration is best known for its success in returning fish populations, wildlife, and plants in sites where they have been lost. For instance, the Atlantic salmon and brown trout returned to the city center of Oslo after pollution prevention and stream restoration (Saltveit et al., 2019). This would not be achieved by human actions alone: getting predominantly carnivorous fish populations, such as salmon, return may be preceded by humans introducing plants that enable certain herbivorous animal populations return to the stream first, which in turn attracts and supports the return of salmon. This example also illustrates the sensitivity of recognition to context and dynamism and the importance of cyclical temporalities, which greatly influence interspecies interactions and population dynamics, in implementing and monitoring restoration activities.

Because of its aim to restore and revive nature's functionings, ecological restoration business might appear recognitive by default. However, restorative business may become—and today often is, critics suggest—misrecognitive. The rapid growth of the restoration business in the West (Booth et al., 2016) has attracted numerous new business to enter the industry, invoking questions about the balance between ecological and business goals (Mohr & Metcalf, 2018). The industry is likely to continue rapid growth when states and corporations respond to the global demands and

globally agreed targets for increasing ecological restoration and other biodiversity action. This poses challenges not only to stakeholder considerations but also to ethics generally.[20] The quick and highly technical, standardized restoration practices are common in profit-driven approaches to restoration. Standardized restoration is critiqued by ecologists who endorse sensitive process facilitation instead of 'overengineering' (Mohr & Metcalf, 2018; Palmer et al., 2014) and call for high sensitivity to place- and system-specific differences and features that should be taken into account in the restoration processes. Earth-moving with heavy machinery within a river channel is effective but detrimentally neglects how the surrounding landscape impacts on a stream's characteristics (Booth et al., 2016; Palmer et al., 2014). In the US and elsewhere, this tension has generated a power struggle between 'private science' supporting the standardized, business-driven focus on channel modification, and academic restoration ecology emphasizing the importance of contextual sensitivity (Lave et al., 2010) and calling for the integration of technical expertise with learning and socio-ecological understanding of system development, acknowledging the local embeddedness of restoration (Booth et al., 2016). Ecosystem's future development trajectories are numerous at various stages of the restoration process, and choices between them are sensitive to power use. Thus, the human presence in ecological restoration makes the perspective of power important (e.g., Light & Higgs, 1996). This involves the power to define if a system has reached its integrity. Because ecological integrity is a concept used both in ecology and in interdisciplinary contexts, respecting and restoring integrity is a matter of pairing scientific knowledge, ethics, and critical reflection as a reflexive learning process that continues throughout organizational activities. This creates a feedback loop (Fig. 1) and emphasizes the nonlinear temporalities that must be acknowledged in recognitive stakeholder interaction with nonhumans (Tryggestad et al., 2013).

Inclusiveness in knowledge production helps challenge the dominant value hierarchies or the unquestioned views of the most powerful parties involved in restoration. Inclusiveness promotes diversity in what becomes visible for organizational activities. The politics of in/visibility is linked to power relations: invisibility is a way of silently maintaining the current relations of domination, and negotiations at operation site often involve power struggles about what should be made visible and why. Because economic interests may conflict with the ecological interests as discussed, it is crucial that integrity assessment is not dominated by the party with the greatest economic interests at stake. Yet, nothing guarantees perfectly balanced power relations; at the current state of the domination of business over nature, we see more important to pay attention to correcting power imbalances instead of asking where the point of perfect balance would be.

The above noted importance of context-sensitivity takes us to consider the recognition of difference, the other focal aspect of recognition. Realizing the recognition of difference–translating an attitude into practice–requires particularization. Our recognition-guiding questions (Table 2) call for paying attention especially to the context-specific relations and signals. First, restoration should strive to sustain and strengthen the 'essential characteristics' of a system-to-be, the context-specific systemic features and related nonhuman ways of being (Preston & Antonsen, 2021, 28). This pays attention both to living entities and their relations. Organizations can sensitize themselves to the local, place-specific nonhuman agencies by incorporating flexibility into operations (Booth et al., 2016; Higgs et al., 2018) and acknowledging the multidimensional values of place, including its values for the nonhuman stakeholders (Araujo et al., 2021). This generates a sort of 'names and places' approach (cf. McVea & Freeman, 2005) to particularizing nature to establish proper respect and care for it. Particularization involves the careful identification of species that inhabit or have inhabited the site, relations that are constitutive to system integrity, and the consideration of relevant native reference ecosystems to increase reassemblation processes (Gann et al., 2019). Much of the particularization happens at systems- and species/populations levels with a focus on the place-specific conditions for ecological integrity, yet sensitivity to the individual level is required as well. For example, the revelation of an on-site nesting place may urge a careful consideration of how the mother's opportunities for offspring care (mother–offspring relationships) could be safeguarded: here, 'whether' and 'how' are context-specific questions. This is also where the stakeholder attribute of proximity or nearness (Driscoll & Starik, 2004) comes into play: stream ecosystem restoration necessitates direct 'hands-on' work until the ecosystem functions on its own

[20] It is basically problematic (especially from the viewpoint of duty-based ethics), admittedly, that some organizations can benefit economically from the presence of many systematically harmful practices in the present world. On the other hand, it is also very problematic (from the viewpoint of consequence-oriented ethics) if reparative or restorative measures are postponed because nobody is permitted to make a living or get profit from it. We cannot explore this question deeper here but want to highlight the importance of two distinctions here. First, the level of profitability may matter: few consider it wrong if a person devotes a lifetime to ecological restoration in the case someone guarantees that person a decent livelihood for that activity. Second, the distribution of benefits and harms may also matter: it seems particularly wrong if companies who earlier profited from harming the stream ecosystem are then able to profit from restoring it: this would be opposite to the 'polluter pays principle.'

and particular attention to those entities that organizational activities influence directly.

Guiding questions also call attention to signals. The involvement of locally embedded knowing and ecological expertise is needed not only to define the restoration process starting point, objectives, and criteria for successful restoration, but also to interpret the emerging on-site nonhuman signals (cf. Romero & Dryzek, 2020; Whiteman & Cooper, 2011). Our multiperspectival understanding of nature suggests that various types of knowing may help bring meaning to otherwise undifferentiated or unnoticeable cues in the environment. Knowing should be developed across different perspectives for the sake of power balance in communication between humans and nonhumans. Leaning only on one (often instrumental rationalist) interpretation of nature is questionable. Conventional ecological and biological epistemologies excluding human presence should be accompanied with attunement to the agential nonhuman capacities at the operation site, particularly their reciprocal responsivity to restoration activities (like some animal species acting as 'ecosystem engineers,' plants as nitrogen fixers, or some species contextually as urban adapters). Signals of nonhuman nature become valuable sources of knowing. The establishment of recognitive partnerships with nature necessitates listening to, interpreting, and studying nonhuman stakeholders and their signals with sensitivity to their distinctive features and vulnerabilities. Finally, the recognition of and listening to nature involves acknowledging that there is always something unknown in the ecological processes; thinking otherwise is arrogant and misrecognitive.

Recognition thereby becomes realized via the particularization that influences on-site practices and knowing. Beyond the context-specific operations, lessons from recognitive practices can 'feed back' to universal recognition by contributing to greater transformations in organizational thinking and revising the presently dominant management practices where the priority of economic interest generates ecologically unideal solutions (Mohr & Metcalf, 2018). Approaching nonhuman stakeholders as partners also requires valuing the meaning of the ecological systems for nonhuman life, not just for humans and business (cf. Hailwood, 2015, p. 143). Thus, it becomes understood that normative recognition urges the acceptance of economically nonoptimal solutions (and sometimes higher economic risks) for ecologically better outcomes. Recognitive business is not identical to the most profitable business but, rather, to responsible business.

Discussion and Conclusions

The recognition approach makes two significant contributions to stakeholder theorizing on nonhuman nature: universal recognition that grounds the normative claim for nonhuman stakeholderness on the ecologically informed notion of integrity, and the recognition of difference that urges particularizing nonhuman nature as distinct stakeholders. In addition, we contribute to stakeholder theory by providing an alternative to the anthropocentric approaches. Previous stakeholder theorizing includes 'seeds' for incorporating recognition of nonhuman nature into stakeholder theory and organizational activities (e.g., Sama et al., 2004; Tallberg et al., 2021; Tryggestad et al., 2013) yet they warrant development to advance the inclusion of nonhumans as particularized stakeholders.[21] Thus, the recognition approach adds to the continuum of nonanthropocentric ethical approaches, but takes an important step beyond mere nonanthropocentrism, by explicating that the acknowledgment of the intrinsic value of nonhuman nature would imply universal recognition and recognition of difference in organization–nature relationships.

Universal Recognition: Nonhumans as Stakeholders

Recognition attributes a normative standing to nonhumans on the basis of their agency, integrity, and distinctiveness (Hailwood, 2015; Laitinen & Kortetmäki, 2019; Schlosberg, 2007, 2014). Stakeholder management for sustainability necessitates a version of stakeholder theory where nonhumans can be stakeholders, even partners. A partner can *provide* resources for business but should never be instrumentalized as a resource. Defining agency and integrity in ways that assume human capacities is untenably anthropocentric (Heikkurinen et al., 2021; Romero & Dryzek, 2020). Recognizing the integrity (and agency as preceding integrity) grounds approaching nonhuman individuals and collectives as organizational stakeholders. As our cycle of recognition (Fig. 1) demonstrates, a first step in recognition is universal: it begins with acknowledging the moral status of nonhuman nature, respecting its integrity, and accepting that respect for integrity will have implications for organization–nonhuman relationships. The next step in recognizing nonhuman nature is to integrate recognition in organizational relationships. This necessitates particularizing nonhuman nature to make different nonhuman interests and vulnerabilities visible for enacting the recognition of difference.

[21] The depiction of system-objects that 'disclose in a specific time and place a horizon that is always unique' (Heikkurinen et al., 2016, p. 710) is too particularizing to retain a solid connection to the importance of understanding species- and system-typical features that concretize the morally appropriate conduct toward those entities. Also, the aforementioned proposal is unclear in its normative implications regarding individuals vis-á-vis ecosystem entities (ecocentric approaches are nonindividualist).

Recognition and the Particularization of Nonhuman Nature

Recognition of difference attends to how integrity unfolds in distinctive ways. The tendency of stakeholder research to treat nonhuman nature in singular (for exceptions, see Driscoll & Starik, 2004; Starik, 1995; Tallberg et al., 2021) dismisses diversity and sustains difficulties in conceptualizing organization–nature relationships in stakeholder theorizing in respectful ways. Nevertheless, as Driscoll and Starik (2004) note, not all nonhuman particulars can be stakeholders at all times. Thus, recognition necessitates particularization that helps identify the relevant stakeholders and answer *how* to enact recognition as respectful interaction. Particularization involves expert contributions to understand the relevant context-specific nonhuman features, signals, and vulnerabilities. Interaction with nonhumans and their respectful studying may, in turn, yield new information influencing stakeholder identification (Fig. 1, reflexive learning loop) and organizational actions. Table 2 provides guiding questions for such processes, acknowledging the complexities and dynamics of nonhuman stakeholder types: individuals and collectives complement each other, and 'systems-to-be' can mature during restoration, as our case demonstrates. It should be noted that while recognition gains its transformative force from urging actors to pay attention to diversity and particularities in nature and nonhuman agency, recognition is not simply about the 'respect for the uniqueness of each entity' that some authors advocate (Heikkurinen et al., 2016). A sole focus on uniqueness might dissipate the *species-typical* and *system-typical* features and capacities that must be given consideration to protect nonhuman integrity.

Recognition-based approaches in organizational ethics highlight embodied agency and meaningful engagement between embodied beings. These works understand recognition as grounding respect for others in both their difference and sameness (Hancock, 2008; Pless & Maak, 2004), as paying attention to the interrelatedness between subjects (Islam, 2012), and as establishing genuine respect for autonomy. Yet, recognition-oriented organizational ethics has so far only concerned humans. Recognition approaches could contribute to theorizing both human and nonhuman stakeholders with sensitivity to their corporeality, materiality, relatedness, and particularity. Our work thereby extends business ethics scholarship on recognition and answers the call by business ethics scholars (Pless & Maak, 2004) to expand the inclusive diversity beyond internal stakeholders and to question dominant anthropocentric framings (cf. Purser et al., 1995; Romero & Dryzek, 2020; Waddock, 2011). Of course, recognition is not a panacea for everything but, rather, an essential element of transformative changes. This could have profound normative implications for stakeholder theory and, more broadly, for organizational interaction with nonhumans.

An Alternative to the Anthropocentric Approaches in Stakeholder Theory

We propose an alternative to the anthropocentric approaches in stakeholder theory. Another response to the anthropocentric tone would be to reject stakeholder theory in studying and discussing organization–nature relations. Some may doubt whether stakeholder theory can be 'rescued' from anthropocentrism or be the best approach to advance sustainability. As we see it, probing the 'boundaries' of stakeholder theory – regardless of which theory is ultimately best for overcoming anthropocentrism – is an important, unfinished task to which we contribute. Moreover, stakeholder theory is the most established approach with a focus on interactions and relationships (Freeman et al., 2010; Jones & Wicks, 1999), which makes it a key candidate for (further) examining organization–nature relationships. The previous conceptual developments in ethics have demonstrated that anthropocentric concepts can transform: justice is a case in point.[22] We maintain that making the organizational research sensitive to nonhuman matters *requires* revising the established mainstream concepts (Starik & Kanashiro, 2013; Winn & Pogutz, 2013): change cannot be expected to permeate the mainstream thinking merely by introducing radical, 'niche' conceptualizations that lack connection to the established vocabulary.

Practical Implications

Our article has several practical implications for organizations, be they already sustainability-oriented or in the beginning of their sustainability journey. First, the recognition approach offers a new ethically informed understanding and vocabulary of nonhuman stakeholders in organization–nature relationships. Instrumentalist, power-based approaches offer little or no possibilities for ethical reflection or intrinsic valuation of nonhumans, sidelining managers and organizational practices that perceive nonhumans as stakeholders and partners, not resources, in organizational activities (Tallberg et al., 2021; Vlasov, 2019). The recognition vocabulary provides space for managers to create and nurture noninstrumentalizing

[22] Initially, justice focused only on relations between humans as contract-making beings. However, critical environmental justice, ecological justice, animal and multispecies justice literatures have advanced the conceptual–theoretical development so strongly that justice is no longer assumed as a 'humans-only' concept in political theory.

approaches. Second, recognition has implications to nonhuman stakeholder identification. Particularization provides an important step for identifying that the nonhuman world contains complex individuals and collectives with distinctive features and signals. We align with a dynamic approach to stakeholder identification (Tryggestad et al., 2013), where stakes and stakeholders are identified when they become relevant for the focal activity, or when a relationship is formed with nonhumans. With the help of recognition-evoking features (Table 1) and the guiding questions (Table 2), managers can develop respectful practices in organization–nature relationships.

The recognition of nature also has policy-level implications. We maintain that respectful approaches to nature in business need to be further encouraged and enabled by policy-making. One topical risk is that the regulative pressures for environmental sustainability encourage organizations to seek economically optimal solutions for meeting measurable (quantitative) and comparable environmental targets, such as carbon footprint reductions or recycling rates. Environmental action might become indicator-oriented 'overengineering,' neglecting the context-specific qualitative matters and sensitivity to nonhuman agencies. Measurable benefits may be achieved at the cost of causing other ecological harms or treating nonhumans instrumentally. We find it crucial to consider, in policy-making and in business, *how* different sustainability objectives are to be achieved, including their *qualitative* impacts on nature. Responds to the call for sustainability transformation should manifest the recognition of nature as the recognition of difference to ensure that numbers do not override life. Moreover, because realizing recognition has material costs (Laitinen & Kortetmäki, 2019), the existing economic and institutional arrangements and power disparities may prevent realizing recognition despite attitudinal changes. Therefore, policy-making needs to include noninstrumental and nonanthropocentric vocabularies and approaches.

Limitations and Future Research

Our article has limitations that offer starting points for future research. First, this is a conceptual–theoretical article and the exploration of whether and how the recognition approach is suited to promote respectful organization–nature relationships and sustainability calls for empirical studies in various contexts. Our case illustration reveals only some of the possible aspects in one specific, although illuminating, context. Specifically, we call for qualitative and quantitative research as well as interdisciplinary collaborations on recognitive organizational practices and on exploring what enables and hinders the recognition and particularization of nonhuman stakeholders. Important questions include: How is the recognition of nature urged, granted, and rejected in action, how do power relations and affective bonds (cf. Tallberg et al., 2021) influence recognition struggles, and which stakeholder groups ally to foster or sideline the recognition of nature? How do the different levels of stakeholders, from ecosystems and populations to complex and simple organisms, relate to each other, and how to determine the appropriate level for stakeholder identification in different contexts? Further nuancing of nonhuman stakeholder types is also important to reveal the diversity of nonhuman stakeholders and forms of partnerships that influence the identification and particularization of nonhuman stakeholders.

Second, while we discuss the importance of knowledge related to nature as a basis for ecologically oriented activities, we merely scratch the surface. Future studies are needed to address in depth the questions of how recognition-enhancing knowledge is created and accessed in organizations. We suggest research to explore the intersections of recognition and topics such as ecological sensemaking and experiential knowledge (Whiteman & Cooper, 2000), affective and embodied knowing (Tallberg et al., 2021), and ecological learning (Allen et al., 2019). This also concerns relating the different stakeholder levels (from ecosystems and populations to organisms) relate to each other and how to determine the appropriate level for stakeholder identification in different contexts. Interactions between different levels also warrant further consideration and ontological and epistemic inquiries. Third, we have not focused on power issues related to nonhuman organizing, since we have sought to offer a qualitatively different approach to the dominant power-based approaches to nonhuman stakeholders. However, this does not mean that power asymmetries would not exist in the Anthropocene (Heikkurinen et al., 2021), and we agree that they are detrimental to respectful relationships with the ecological world (Ergene et al., 2018). This calls for future studies to identify processes of overcoming power asymmetries. Finally, a fruitful future discussion beyond the scope of this article would concern the integration of the recognition of humans and nonhumans into a single framework for stakeholder research.

All in all, recognition addresses calls that have questioned the ability of current models in organizations and management scholarship to make a fundamental shift toward environmental sustainability (Phillips, 2019; Starik & Kanashiro, 2013). We encourage interdisciplinary endeavors (Ergene et al., 2018) and advancing research in organization–nature relationships also beyond non-Western contexts toward aligning stakeholder theorizing more closely with biophysical reality, corporeality, and ecological and bodily embeddedness (Sama et al., 2004; Whiteman & Cooper, 2011), and the exploration of different nonanthropocentric ontologies (Heikkurinen et al., 2021). We believe that enacting sustainable organization–nature relationships requires respecting,

but also listening to, particularizing, and making sense of nonhuman nature. Transforming relationships between organizations and nature requires transforming stakeholder theory, and in our view, the recognition approach provides conceptual and normative fuel for that process.

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