Appreciating the non-human landscape? Urban residents' willingness to coexist with animals and plants in Australia and Japan

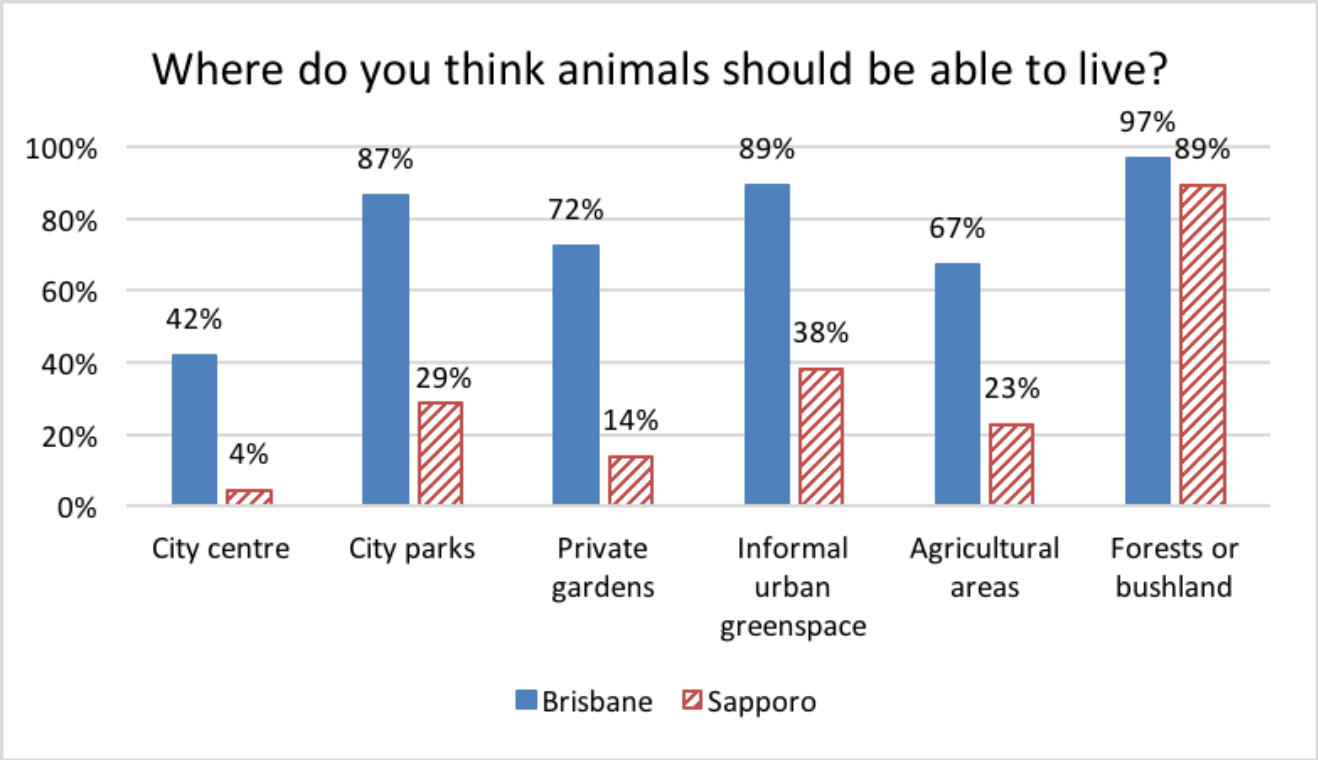
*Christoph Rupprecht[1]

1.Environmental Futures Research Institute, Griffith University

When we think about the urban landscape, we often think of buildings and streets, or natural elements such as mountains, rivers or the sea. But we also share cities with animals and plants, co-inhabiting urban space and interacting on a daily basis. These interactions can lead to wildlife conflicts (e.g., crows looking for food in trash, weeds growing on the sidewalk), because animals and plants are independent actors we cannot control.
In the context of rapid urbanisation, geographers are calling for embracing non-humans as urban co-inhabitants. To find paths towards more-than-human cities and reduce wildlife conflicts, we need to better understand residents' willingness to coexist with plants and animals. This study used a mail-back survey and quantitatively compared residents' preferences toward sharing their neighbourhood and perceptions of belonging across urban green space in two geographically and culturally distinct cities: Brisbane, Australia and Sapporo, Japan.
Results suggest factors influencing respondents' willingness to coexist were geographical and cultural context alongside educational attainment and age, but not sex and income. Mapping respondents' preferences for animals in their neighbourhood revealed four categories divided by two axes –global-local and wanted-unwanted animals. These categories arose from the way animals contested human notions of control over urban space. Most respondents chose informal green space (e.g., vacant lots, brownfields etc.) as spaces of belonging after forests and bushland.
Drawing upon recent theoretical and empirical research on liminal urban spaces, I argue with Nohl (1990) that informal green space can offer 'provisional arrangements', allowing for conciliatory engagements with animals and plants. I thus propose informal green space as potential territories of encounter –a possible path towards more-than-human cities. Finally, I discuss some implications for planning and management of interspecies interactions.

Keywords: urban geography, wildlife conflict, more-than-human, quantitative methods, belonging, posthumanism

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