Scientific abstract – **Non-human animals as political agents in urban human-wildlife crisis: The relationship between human-animal interactions and local governance, politics, identity and the quality of urban life**

The academic research on urban-wildlife crises and, in particular, on the complexity of the relationship between humans and animals in the city is in its infancy. The existing research is deeply rooted in the fields of ecology and biology conservation and is complemented by a few studies from sociology and geography. However, the perspective of public administration is absent. Recently, *Public Administration Review* published a call to acknowledge the importance of the impact of animals on public administration. Since such studies are lacking, there is no systematic theory or suitable methodology that captures the dynamic of animals as political agents and the role of humans' interactions with them in shaping views on urban-wildlife crises, local governance and politics and a sense of belonging.

Our planet has entered a new era – the Anthropocene – in which human activity has become an earth-changing force. As urbanization advances and there is a general decline in wild species, there is a paradoxical global increase in wildlife populations within urban areas. This new and expanding phenomenon has profound implications for everyday life. It raises new conflicts and sparks unexpected alliances. Thus, questions such as 'who owns the city?' concern public administration researchers and practitioners. One of the very first public organizations to face the growing challenge of managing the interaction between humans and nature are municipalities. For them, *human-animal interactions in the urban area* (i.e., any dynamic exchange or relationship between humans and non-human animals in the municipality’s public areas) are a key concern in modern public administration practice. However, in a fast-changing reality, trial-and-error practices make it difficult to design environmental policies concerning human-animal interactions. In a similar vein, theoreticians are yet to understand how these environmental policies are related to residents' views on local governance and politics. Do human-animal interactions create ideas and ideologies that fuel political struggles? How are human-animal interactions related to the quality of urban life, local identity and power relations concerning the right to the city? Similarly, how are these views related to the severity of the urban-wildlife crisis and human-animal interactions?

Therefore, we still have limited understanding of the reasons and mechanisms behind public opinion, public behaviors and politics concerning human-animal interactions, particularly during an urban-wildlife crisis. As an innovative answer to the underdeveloped theory, the current study seeks to examine the issue through the prisms of human-animal relations, public administration, urbanism and anthropology. Thus, it is rooted in the approach that avoids the preference for an anthropocentric perspective that sees humankind as the most important element of existence and all other beings as a means to human ends over the bio-centric perspective – the view that the rights and needs of humans are not more important than those of other living things, or vice versa. Based on our preliminary results we assume that local stakeholders have diverse views on wildlife in urban life and that there has been a politicization of animals that made them to be involved in local political and urban conflicts. Therefore, we utilize a groundbreaking approach called the 'animalscape approach', which in our context, sees non-human animals as stakeholders and political agents capable of influencing residents, localism and politics, independent of their intentions and consciousness.

The proposed research project aims to examine the role of human-animal interactions in shaping dimensions of the urban-wildlife crisis, local politics and local governance, quality of urban life and local identity*, over time*. We will first develop and validate measures for our research model. Thereafter, we will test the model rigorously using a mixed-methods approach: quantitative, large-scale time-series survey experiments and big data analysis, quantitative and qualitative GIS data, and anthropological methods such as participant observations, in-depth interviews, and content analysis. We will take advantage of the urban-wildlife crisis of wild boars on Mount Carmel and in the municipality Haifa, Israel to explore an on-going, live, urban-wildlife crisis. Employing a novel empirical design, the study seeks to test the dynamic of animals and public administration and public affairs to fill the current gaps in the research.