

Two Open PhD Positions in Environmental Humanities – Exploring Biodiversity Narratives (80%)

We invite applications for **two interdisciplinary PhD positions** in the environmental humanities at the intersection of literary and cultural studies, the social sciences, and biodiversity communication.

The two PhD positions are part of a larger research project on the **cultural perception of biodiversity**, focusing specifically on **biodiversity narratives**. The project systematically examines how biodiversity is represented, narrated, and justified across science, politics, and culture – particularly in literature. At its core, the project investigates **how biodiversity acquires value through narratives** – not only in instrumental or ethical terms, but also through aesthetic and affective dimensions. Insights gained from this analysis will be used to inform future approaches to biodiversity **communication**. The focus is on the **German-speaking world and Switzerland**.

Both dissertations will analyze existing narratives and discourses about biodiversity in different societal contexts. One PhD project (PhD 1) will focus on **representations of biodiversity**, the other (PhD 2) on **the justification of biodiversity values and biodiversity conservation**.

The project is funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) and led by **Prof. Dr. Claudia Keller**, a cultural and literary scholar based at the **Environmental Sciences and Humanities Institute (UniFR_ESH)** at the **University of Fribourg**. This highly interdisciplinary institute coordinates and promotes research and teaching in environmental and sustainability studies, providing a unique space for reflection and dialogue on these issues in Switzerland.

PhD 1: Biodiversity Representation

Objectives and tasks:

The PhD project (monograph or cumulative dissertation) will include the following tasks:

- Cultural and literary analysis of biodiversity narratives in science, society, and culture
- Theoretical and methodological development of approaches to analyzing and assessing biodiversity narratives and the values they convey
- Systematize the various forms of biodiversity representations in the various fields
- Interdisciplinary reflection on the role of biodiversity narratives in communication and public understanding
- Organization of workshops and conferences, as well as editorial work within the project framework
- Collaboration with other research groups at the UniFR_ESH Institute and the Department of Geosciences

Candidate Profile:

We are looking for a highly motivated candidate with the following qualifications:

- A completed master's degree, preferably in German Studies, comparative Literature, or another philological or cultural studies discipline. A master's degree in environmental humanities may also qualify
- Familiarity with methods of literary and cultural analysis or a strong willingness to learn them quickly

- Interest in and/or experience with topics such as biodiversity, biodiversity conservation, ecology, and environmental communication
- Enthusiasm for working in an interdisciplinary and collaborative research environment
- Excellent command of German and English (spoken and written); knowledge of French is an asset

PhD 2: Biodiversity Justification

Objectives and tasks:

The PhD project (monograph or cumulative dissertation) will include the following tasks:

- Cultural and literary analysis of biodiversity narratives in science, society, and culture
- Conduct semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from biodiversity science and policy on biodiversity narratives and different forms of justification for biodiversity conservation, followed by the transcription, coding, and qualitative analysis of the interview data.
- Systematize and critically reflect on biodiversity narratives and their ethical justifications from textual and interview data
- Interdisciplinary reflection on the role of biodiversity narratives in communication and public understanding
- Organization of workshops and conferences, as well as editorial work within the project framework
- Collaboration with other research groups at the UniFR_ESH Institute and the Department of Geosciences

Candidate Profile:

We are looking for a highly motivated candidate who brings the following qualifications and qualities:

- A completed master's degree, preferably in literary or cultural studies, sociology, or philosophy (with a focus on ethics). A master's degree in environmental humanities may also qualify
- Familiarity with methods of literary and cultural analysis as well as qualitative social science methods (e.g., interviews, thematic analysis), or a strong willingness to learn these skills quickly
- Interest in and/or experience with topics such as biodiversity, biodiversity conservation, ecology, and communication
- Enthusiasm for working in an interdisciplinary and collaborative research environment
- Excellent command of German and English (spoken and written); knowledge of French is an asset

We offer / further requirements:

- A fully funded, four-year PhD position
- The opportunity to contribute to a theoretically grounded project with direct practical relevance for biodiversity communication and conservation
- Willingness to engage with a clearly defined project while independently utilizing the available scope for initiative
- Close supervision and collaboration within the research group
- A vibrant interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research network in the environmental humanities and environmental sciences
- Participation in the activities of the department and the UniFR_ESH Institute and exchange with other PhD students
- Access to excellent research infrastructure and academic support at the University of Fribourg, and the opportunity for research stays at partner universities in Switzerland or abroad
- Attendance in the office on a minimum of two days, preferably three, is required (Monday, Tuesday and Thursday)

Application documents:

Please submit your application as a single PDF file containing:

- Curriculum vitae (including names and contact details of two referees)
- Motivation letter explaining your interest for one of the two positions
- One page that presents a biodiversity narrative in a literary text and considers how this narrative might be analyzed within the context of biodiversity debates
- Optional: A sample of research work (e.g. a chapter from your master's thesis, research essay or paper etc.)

Deadline, procedure and start:

- Please submit your application to environment@unifr.ch by **March 13**
- The first round of interviews will take place online on **March 31 and April 1**
- On-site interviews will be held on **April 13 and April 14**
- **The position is scheduled to start on June 1**
- A project-related session at the international congress "World Biodiversity Forum" will take place in Davos from **June 15 to 19**; attendance is expected

For questions contact Claudia Keller (claudia.keller@unifr.ch)

More **information** about the project leader and the research project:

www.claudia-keller.ch
<https://www.unifr.ch/directory/en/people/446113/6ad3f>
www.biodiversitätsnarrative.ch

More **information** about the UniFR_ESH Institute:

<https://www.unifr.ch/env/en/>