

# Beyond Extractivism: Humanity Entering the Post-Anthropocene

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Since its rise in popularity the Anthropocene-terminology received wide attention across scholarly disciplines. Due to its controversial discursive nature in circles of the geosciences there has been and is ongoing discussion especially regarding the starting point of this distinct epoch in Earth's (pre-)history. Interestingly, discussions about the *end* of the Anthropocene received only little attention in comparison. Our work aims to contribute a conceptual approach from the perspectives of both sustainability studies and environmental archaeology, utilizing (pre-)historical scholarship to guide future-oriented policies for a *humane* Post-Anthropocene.

## **(Pre-)Historical Landscape Domestication**

Humans have shaped the biosphere as we know it both actively and just through their mere presence well before modern industrialisation (Best & Merkl 2026; Darimont et al. 2023; Ellis et al. 2021). Human culture is therefore nothing separate from nature – as suggested by the classical nature–culture dichotomy– but at its very core (Alexandra 2022; Meier 2012). Being one of many inconspicuous products of evolution only to later become a *Hyper-Keystone Species* impacting all processes of the biosphere (Sullivan et al. 2017).

This process of landscape domestication cannot be undone (Clement & Cassino 2018; Santana 2022). As humans will remain a central force in shaping ecosystems, humanity collectively bears the responsibility for the consequences of its actions, regardless of their nature (Johnson et al. 2024).

## **Breaching *Status Quo Ante***

Human-driven transformations of Earth's systems have reached a scale that fundamentally disrupts any return to a previous *status quo ante*: Processes of landscape domestication, like resource extraction and biosphere modification, have accumulated into long-term structural changes (Lennon 2015). Parts of these domestication processes have led to shifts in the biosphere that result in “what will become the greatest extinction event since the demise of the non-avian dinosaurs 66 million years ago” (Hatfield et al. 2025:12).

The synchronised global challenges of the present are unprecedented in human (pre-)history, as noted by Jones (2025: 840): “the magnitude of instability (...) is beyond what ancient farmers experienced.”

## **Exploitative Nature of Extractivist Logics**

Many of humanity's impact can be linked to extractivist behaviour: Extractivism refers to a development model based on the large-scale extraction of natural resources for export, with limited local value creation and significant environmental and social impacts (Tittor 2026). Additionally, it describes a broader political-economic system that organizes territories, labour, and nature for resource extraction and commodity production. While fossil extractivism is based on coal, oil and gas, post-fossil extractivism means a reliance on intensive resource extraction beyond fossil fuels (Tittor 2026). Since this not only exploits natural resources beyond a sustainable level but also people which is why Magalhães Teixeira & Nicoson (2024: 3) position extractivism “as violence in both symbolic and material terms”.

Apart from these inherently colonial themes *post-extractivist* are lifestyles and systems that promote reduced material throughput, territorial justice and local community based economies (Gómez-Baggethun 2022; Tittor 2026).

This emphasises also the ethical relevance of economic practices for other humans, since marginalised people are the most affected by exploitative behaviours and discrimination (Best 2026; Malin et al. 2019; Orihuela et al. 2022).

### Besides Post-Anthropos

Characterising the scenarios and transition between Anthropocene and Post-Anthropocene is crucial to adequately situate humanity's position and agency in this process.

Regarding the *facies* of such Post-Anthropocene eras two core readings prevail: a post-fossil extractivist and a post-extractivist humanity. The former constitutes itself by the right and the responsibility to take full control and manage the Earth system with technical means and based on existing patterns, for example speculating about visions of post-human economic systems, run by new forms of AI solving all problems.

The latter bases itself in the responsibility to transform cultural and socio-economic systems achieving resilience within both planetary boundaries and *caring* coexistence (Arora 2019). This would build on the *novel* conditions that emerged due to irreversible large-scale anthropogenic exploitation during the Anthropocene.

### Paths to Take

Future-oriented policies navigating humanity in a humane Post-Anthropocene necessarily need to be thought beyond persistent extractivist logics (Tittor 2026). The exploitations of both resources of the natural environment and other human beings as well as cultures are deeply interlinked (Dunlap et al. 2024). Without immediate changes in global economic systems and cultural decisions the Post-Anthropocene will be constituted on the *absence* of an (organised) Anthropos (Ordonez et al. 2024; Spangenberg 2022a, 2022b).

The historical sciences have the ability and responsibility to pave the way for this Herculean task by researching past societal transformations and dynamics in times of crisis (Best 2026; Rockman & Hritz 2020).

### Conclusion

We conclude that due to their inherently harmful - to both people and the environment - nature extractivist ideologies and systems need to be discarded.

Learning from lives and societies of the past building resilient communities is possible, even in times of irreversible changes.

As the Hyper-Keystone-Species of this time, humanity should use its key wisely. And lock away false solutions. Resulting in a *humane* Post-Anthropocene.

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