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► To cite this version:

Nico Eisenhauer, Karin Frank, Alexandra Weigelt, Bartosz Bartkowski, Rémy Beugnon, et al.. A belowground perspective on the nexus between biodiversity change, climate change, and human well-being. *Journal of Sustainable Agriculture and Environment*, 2024, Diana Wall Special issue, 3 (2), pp.e212108. 10.1002/sae2.12108 . hal-04902265

HAL Id: hal-04902265

<https://hal.science/hal-04902265v1>

Submitted on 24 Feb 2025

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REVIEW ARTICLE

A belowground perspective on the nexus between biodiversity change, climate change, and human well-being

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Funding information

Sächsisches Staatsministerium für
 Wissenschaft und Kunst,
 Grant/Award Number: 3-7304/35/6-2021/
 48880; Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft,
 Grant/Award Numbers: Ei 862/29-1, FZT
 118, 202548816

Abstract

Soil is central to the complex interplay among biodiversity, climate, and society. This paper examines the interconnectedness of soil biodiversity, climate change, and societal impacts, emphasizing the urgent need for integrated solutions. Human-induced biodiversity loss and climate change intensify environmental degradation, threatening human well-being. Soils, rich in biodiversity and vital for ecosystem function regulation, are highly vulnerable to these pressures, affecting nutrient cycling, soil fertility, and resilience. Soil also crucially regulates climate, influencing energy, water cycles, and carbon storage. Yet, climate change poses significant challenges to soil health and carbon dynamics, amplifying global warming. Integrated approaches are essential, including sustainable land management, policy interventions, technological innovations, and societal engagement. Practices like agroforestry and organic farming improve soil health and mitigate climate impacts. Effective policies and governance are crucial for promoting sustainable practices and soil conservation. Recent technologies aid in

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monitoring soil biodiversity and implementing sustainable land management. Societal engagement, through education and collective action, is vital for environmental stewardship. By prioritizing interdisciplinary research and addressing key frontiers, scientists can advance understanding of the soil biodiversity–climate change–society nexus, informing strategies for environmental sustainability and social equity.

KEYWORDS

biodiversity change, climate change, human well-being, soil biodiversity

1 | BACKGROUND

Biodiversity loss and climate change, which are both driven by human activities like habitat destruction and pollution as well as climate change (IPBES, 2019; Pereira et al., 2024), are closely linked (Mahecha et al., 2022; Pörtner et al., 2021). Climate change worsens biodiversity loss by altering ecosystems, degrading habitats, and intensifying extreme weather events (Mahecha et al., 2022; Pörtner et al., 2021). This loss weakens the ability of ecosystems to provide vital services like clean water and pollination, exacerbating the impact on society. Changes in biodiversity and climate patterns directly affect human well-being, impacting agriculture, food security, health, and livelihoods (Pörtner et al., 2021). To address these challenges, integrated approaches are needed, considering the complex interactions among biodiversity, climate, and society (Pörtner et al., 2021). Here, we highlight that soils play an essential role in this nexus (Figure 1).

2 | THE SOIL BIODIVERSITY–CLIMATE CHANGE–SOCIETY NEXUS

Soil, often referred to as the 'living thin skin of the solid Earth,' has a central role in the intricate interplay between biodiversity, climate, and human society (Pörtner et al., 2021). Its significance results from its function as a reservoir of biodiversity, a carbon sink or source, as well as a regulator of the water cycle, nutrient cycling, and various other ecosystem properties and processes crucial for sustaining life on Earth (Anthony et al., 2024; Bardgett & van der Putten, 2014; Crowther et al., 2019; Porporato et al., 2004; Wall et al., 2015). In the context of ongoing changes in biodiversity and climate, understanding the role of soil becomes increasingly important in addressing environmental challenges and promoting sustainable development (Figure 1).

2.1 | The role of soils in supporting biodiversity

The biodiversity of terrestrial ecosystems, encompassing the variety of life forms at genetic, species, functional, and ecosystem levels, is intimately connected with soil health (Montgomery et al., 2024). Soils harbor a complex diversity of microorganisms, ranging from fungi,

bacteria and archaea, to insects and other invertebrates as well as some vertebrates, collectively known as soil biota, which account for ~59% of all species on Earth (Anthony et al., 2024). This rich soil biodiversity contributes to essential ecosystem functions, such as soil fertility, organic matter decomposition, and maintenance of soil structure (Bardgett & van der Putten, 2014). Moreover, soil biodiversity supports aboveground biodiversity by facilitating plant growth and creating biotic niches, influencing plant community composition, and ultimately ecosystem resilience to external stress factors (Van Der Heijden et al., 2008; Wardle et al., 2004).

One of the primary mechanisms through which soil biodiversity influences aboveground biodiversity is through mutualistic interactions with plants (Wardle et al., 2004). Mycorrhizal fungi, for instance, form symbiotic relationships with the roots of most plant species, facilitating nutrient uptake in exchange for carbohydrates (Smith &

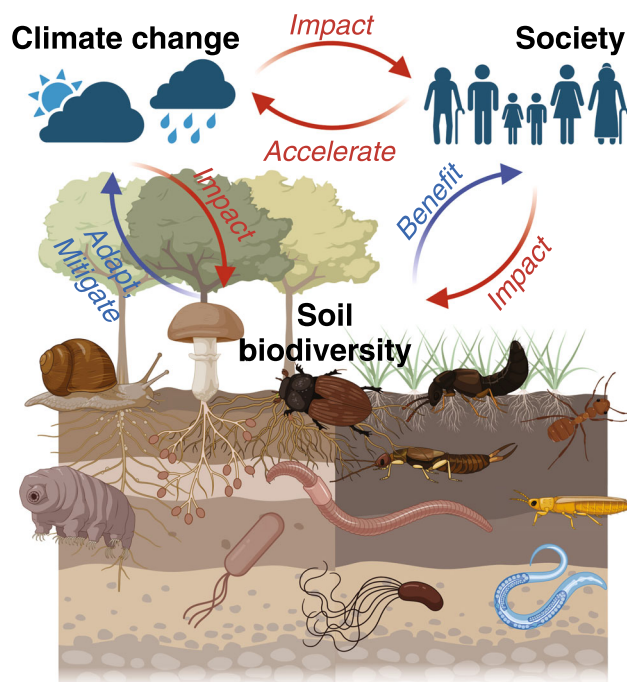


FIGURE 1 The soil biodiversity – climate change – society nexus. Figure redrawn and modified after Korn et al. (2019) and Pörtner et al. (2021). Red arrows represent threats; blue arrows indicate opportunities, according to Pörtner et al. (2021).



Read, 2010; Tedersoo et al., 2020). This mutualism provides protection against pathogens and improves disease resistance (Cameron et al., 2013; Powell et al., 2009), enhances productivity (Powell et al., 2009; Van Der Heijden et al., 2008), and resilience to environmental stressors (Augé et al., 2015), thereby promoting biodiversity at higher trophic levels (Bonfante & Genre, 2010). Soil organisms, such as earthworms, nematodes, and microarthropods, contribute to soil fertility and structure through their activities facilitating plant growth (e.g. of monocultures such as crops), but it also promotes the coexistence of species allowing us to leverage the advantages of polycultures for ecosystem services and stability (Bardgett & van der Putten, 2014).

However, habitat destruction, increasing urbanization (Castells-Quintana et al., 2021), intensive land use and exploitation, pollution (Zacher et al., 2023), and climate change impacts, pose significant threats to soil biodiversity and ecosystem stability (Castells-Quintana et al., 2021; FAO et al., 2020; Phillips et al., 2023). A decline in soil biodiversity can potentially lead to reduced nutrient cycling, decreased carbon-use efficiency, decreased soil fertility, and increased susceptibility to pests and diseases, compromising the productivity and resilience of agricultural and natural ecosystems (FAO et al., 2020; Fonte et al., 2023). Moreover, disruptions to soil biodiversity can have cascading effects on aboveground biodiversity (Wardle et al., 2004), potentially triggering further biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation.

2.2 | The role of soils for climate regulation

Soils are crucial for the intricate interplay between the biosphere and the atmosphere. They influence and modulate the partitioning of energy, mass, and momentum fluxes; thus, they play an important part in all major climate cycles. For example, soil moisture regulates the water cycle through the evapotranspiration flux to the atmosphere. Biodiverse soils are characterized by functional diversity (Wall et al., 2015), which includes the capability to retain rainwater. The capacity to hold water has several positive effects. Two of them are reduced runoff and reduced degradation of the soil (Zhang et al., 2019), as well as the ability to reduce heat waves by evaporative cooling (Lapidot et al., 2019; Moss et al., 2019; Paschalis et al., 2021). Both effects help to moderate extreme events, such as floods or drought and even effects of heatwaves, where soils have been shown to be even more affected than air (García-García et al., 2023), which can lead to feedbacks with increased hydrophobicity (Goebel et al., 2011). In the energy cycle, soil moisture and soil temperature determine the fluxes of latent and sensible heat, respectively. Soil albedo regulates the amount of solar radiation that is absorbed by the land surface. While moist and nutrient-rich soils have a low albedo and absorb the majority of radiation, dry and nutrient-deficient soils are more reflective (Lohila et al., 2010). While this leads to a potential warming by absorbing more radiation compared to nutrient-deficient soils, nutrient-rich and biodiverse soils promote vegetation growth (Fonte et al., 2023), which, in the

long term, acts as a carbon sink but also enhances the broadband solar albedo and reduces solar warming.

Soil plays a crucial role in the global carbon cycle, greenhouse gas emissions, and climate regulation (Bossio et al., 2020; Paustian et al., 2016; Tian et al., 2020). Moreover, they represent the largest terrestrial carbon pool, storing more carbon than the atmosphere and vegetation combined (Crowther et al., 2019; Friedlingstein et al., 2023). This organic carbon is derived from plant residues, microbial biomass, and organic matter inputs, which are decomposed and transformed by soil organisms into stable forms of soil organic carbon (SOC; Schmidt et al., 2011). SOC not only contributes to the long-term biospheric carbon storage, mitigating the accumulation of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere, but also regulates soil fertility, water retention, and nutrient availability. Microbially-mediated mechanisms of soil carbon sequestration include soil aggregation, transfer of carbon from labile to recalcitrant fractions, and improving plant growth and thus carbon input to the soil (Mason et al., 2023). Furthermore, natural and agricultural soils emit N₂O and other greenhouse gasses to the atmosphere, thereby further contributing to changes in the Earth's radiative budget (Tian et al., 2020).

Under strong wind speed conditions, open soil surfaces can serve as significant sources of atmospheric dust aerosols (e.g. Tegen & Schepanski, 2009). These dust aerosols play crucial roles in climate dynamics, atmospheric chemistry, and biogeochemical cycling on regional and global scales (Kok et al., 2021). Dust aerosols are a crucial element in clouds by facilitating ice formation at comparatively warm temperatures (up to 10°C warmer; Villanueva et al., 2021), with consequences for rain formation (e.g., Mülmenstädt et al., 2015). Dust can also inhibit leaf processes, such as photosynthesis, respiration, and transpiration (Farmer, 1993), but also aid nutritional uptake through leaves as an alternative to roots (Gross et al., 2021). Agricultural activities can contribute significantly to generating aeolian dust through the disturbance of soil surfaces and intensive land-use practices (Bartkowski et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2023). Moreover, about 25% of soil surfaces in drylands are covered by biological crusts, corresponding to approximately 12% of land surfaces. These crusts can consist of various amounts of algae, lichens, mosses, fungi, and bacteria, which live in the top part of the soil (Bowker et al., 2018). Such crusts are thus key to soil stability and erosion control, inhibiting the emission of mineral dust in areas that would otherwise be strong dust emission sources and reducing carbon loss through erosion. It has been estimated that this effect reduces the atmospheric dust burden by up to 60% (Rodríguez-Caballero et al., 2022), which is why alterations in factors that change the stability of these crusts may have significant consequences for biodiversity-climate feedback effects.

However, climate change poses significant challenges to soil carbon dynamics and climate regulation (Beillouin et al., 2023). Rising temperatures, altered precipitation patterns, and extreme weather events can accelerate soil carbon losses (Fan et al., 2022; Nottingham et al., 2020; Patoine et al., 2022) through increased microbial activity, decomposition rates, and soil hot extremes (García-García et al., 2023;



Mahecha et al., 2010) and erosion (Guerra et al., 2020). Moreover, changes in land use and management practices, such as deforestation, intensive agriculture, and urbanization, can lead to the depletion of soil carbon stocks, the release of stored carbon into the atmosphere or through erosion and lateral transport (Lauerwald et al., 2023; Van Vliet, 2019; Wang et al., 2023). These mechanisms may further contribute to climate change and exacerbate its impacts on soil health and ecosystem functioning.

Furthermore, changes in soil carbon dynamics can influence climate-carbon feedback loops, with the potential to exacerbate the rate and magnitude of climate change (Heimann & Reichstein, 2008; Paustian et al., 2016). For example, the thawing of permafrost soils in high-latitude regions can release large amounts of greenhouse gases, including methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O), and carbon dioxide (CO₂) into the atmosphere, further accelerating global warming and permafrost degradation (Gasser et al., 2018; Ramage et al., 2024; Schuur et al., 2015; Voigt et al., 2020). Similarly, the loss of soil carbon, nutrients, and fertility in tropical forests due to deforestation and land degradation can reduce the resilience of these ecosystems to climate change and increase the risk of significant ecosystem change (Dlamini et al., 2014; Labrière et al., 2015; Mitchard, 2018; Veldkamp et al., 2020).

Moreover, climate extreme events like drought can alter soil-plant-atmosphere interactions and compromise the soil's role as a sink for volatiles (Insam & Seewald, 2010; Werner et al., 2021), which may have significant positive feedback effects and accelerate climate change (Eisenhauer & Weigelt, 2021; Mahecha et al., 2022, 2024). Targeted soil management has the potential to influence the exchange rates between ecosystems and the atmosphere, and "climate-smart soils" can thus reduce climate feedbacks mediated by greenhouse gases (Figure 2; Paustian et al., 2016).

3 | CONNECTING THE DOTS: LINKAGES BETWEEN SOIL BIODIVERSITY LOSS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change and the loss of soil biodiversity are intricately linked through complex feedback loops and interdependencies, requiring a holistic approach that addresses both issues simultaneously (Figure 1). Based on the review of current knowledge above, there are several key reasons why these two challenges should be addressed together:

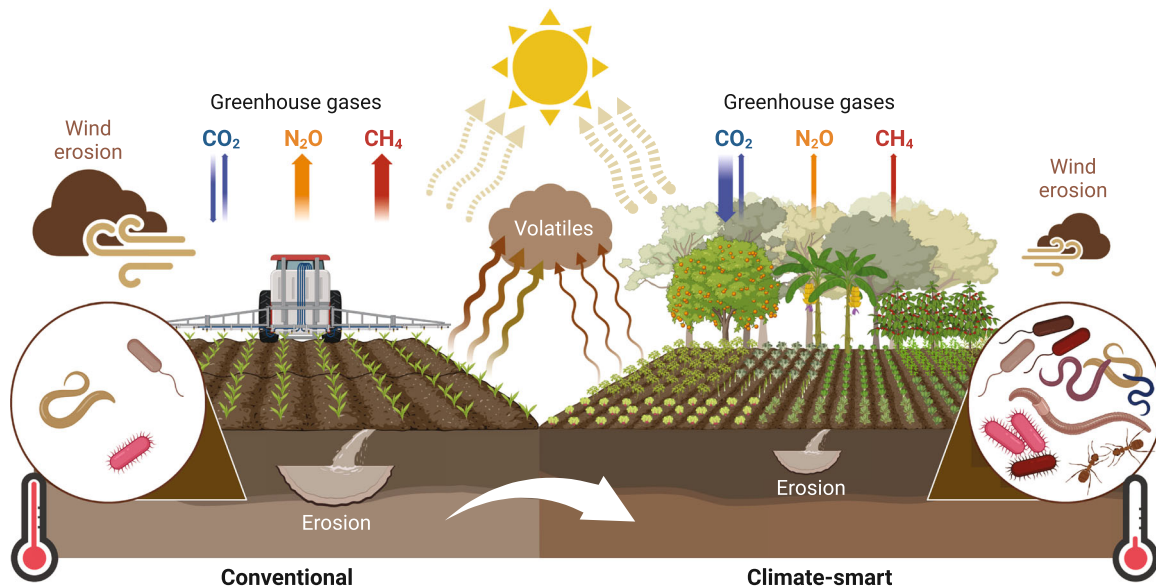


FIGURE 2 Climate-smart soils (redrawn and revised after Paustian et al. 2016). Fundamental research into soil processes, the expansion of measurement and monitoring networks, and the continued development of global geospatial soil data can enhance predictive models and decrease uncertainties. Ongoing advancements in information technology and the integration of complex systems and 'Big Data' present opportunities to involve a wide range of stakeholders, including land managers, in contributing local agricultural management insights through web-based computer and mobile applications. This collaboration can drive the development of advanced model-based greenhouse gas (GHG) metrics. Such efforts will facilitate the adoption of climate-smart soil management policies, including cap-and-trade systems, product supply-chain initiatives for 'low-carbon' consumer goods, and national and international GHG mitigation strategies, while also fostering more sustainable and climate-resilient agricultural systems worldwide. As a consequence, climate-smart soils are likely to experience lower soil erosion rates, will reduce GHG emissions and alter the amount and composition of volatiles taken up by and released from soils, and change albedo (see main text for more details on these mechanisms). According to Paustian et al. (2016) promising science and technology advancements include basic research on plant-soil processes, research measurement networks, soil monitoring networks, advanced greenhouse gas networks, and remote sensing, spatial databases and model integration. Practices for climate-smart soils include reduced tillage, biochar management, land restoration, improved crop rotations, organic amendments, nutrient management, cover crops, and agroforestry. Implementation requires national and international greenhouse gas mitigation programs, greenhouse gas offset and ecosystem service markets, agricultural product supply chain management, decision-support systems, and land-user engagement.



1. **Feedback loops:** Soil biodiversity loss and climate change may be related to and even exacerbate each other through feedback loops that amplify their respective impacts. However, empirical evidence is scarce thus far and more research on potential reciprocal effects is needed. For example, as climate change alters temperature and precipitation patterns, it can directly affect soil biodiversity by threatening soil communities and processes (Phillips et al., 2023; Sünnemann et al., 2023). In turn, changes in soil biodiversity can influence soil moisture, soil temperatures, carbon sequestration rates, soil fertility, and ecosystem resilience (Bardgett & van der Putten, 2014; Delgado-Baquerizo et al., 2020), thereby altering the climate regulation capacity of soils (Eisenhauer & Weigelt, 2021; Paustian et al., 2016). Climate change can disrupt these processes by altering temperature and moisture regimes, leading to increased rates of soil carbon loss and reduced carbon sequestration capacity as well as changes in greenhouse gas and volatile emissions.
2. **Ecosystem resilience:** Soil biodiversity is critical in enhancing ecosystem resilience to climate change by supporting ecosystem functions. Healthy soils with diverse microbial and animal communities are better able to withstand environmental stressors, such as drought, flooding, and extreme temperatures, as well as plant, animal, and human pathogens (Wall et al., 2015), thereby maintaining ecosystem stability and productivity (Scherzinger et al., 2023). Conversely, soil biodiversity loss can weaken ecosystem resilience, making ecosystems more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and reducing their capacity to provide essential services to society (Bardgett & Caruso, 2020; Yang et al., 2018).
3. **Land degradation:** Soil biodiversity loss and climate change are major drivers of land degradation, which encompasses processes, such as soil erosion, desertification, and salinization (FAO et al., 2020). Land degradation reduces soil fertility, impairs ecosystem functioning, increases dust emissions, and threatens food security, water resources, and biodiversity. By addressing soil biodiversity loss and climate change together, synergistic solutions can be developed to restore degraded lands, improve soil health, and enhance ecosystem resilience. This approach can thereby promote sustainable land-management practices and mitigate the impacts of environmental degradation (Figure 2; Wall et al., 2015).

4 | THE ROLE OF SOCIETY IN MITIGATING SOIL BIODIVERSITY LOSS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Society's pivotal role in mitigating soil biodiversity loss and climate change hinges on comprehensive engagement across all levels, from grassroots initiatives to global governance structures (van der Putten et al., 2023) as well as from individuals, groups, and businesses, thus state and non-state actors alike (Fritsche et al., 2018; Zacher et al., 2023). These interconnected challenges can be addressed only

through concerted efforts encompassing collective action, policy advocacy, inclusive practices, and individual behavioral change (Hoppe et al., 2023; IPBES, 2019). Several key roles emerge for society in this endeavor:

1. **Sustainable land management practices:** Adopting sustainable land management practices is critical for preserving soil biodiversity, enhancing ecosystem resilience to disturbances, and mitigating climate change (Sünnemann et al., 2023). Practices and approaches, such as intercropping, soil inoculation, agroforestry, organic farming, conservation agriculture, reforestation, and ecological restoration, can promote soil health, reduce soil erosion, and enhance carbon sequestration in soil and vegetation (Figure 2; Paustian et al., 2016). By supporting farmers, land-owners, and land managers in implementing these practices (Gütschow et al., 2021; Zacher et al., 2023), society can contribute to the restoration of degraded lands, the conservation of biodiversity, and the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions (Paustian et al., 2016). Support can, for example, come in the form of payments for the public-good ecosystem services that healthy soils provide. At the same time, strengthening a sense of social identity, collective ecological responsibility, soil stewardship norms, and collective efficacy (Fritsche & Masson, 2021) in agricultural communities should support the emergence of joint collective action intentions to protect soils (Rabinovich et al., 2020). While many of these actions have a local focus, sustainable soil management requires a global perspective to not 'relocate' pressures on soil biodiversity to other regions of the globe (van der Putten et al., 2023).
2. **Policy and governance:** Climate and biodiversity policy constitute an intricate web of international, transnational, national, and local dynamics. Across diverse studies, researchers have delved into this intricate web, scrutinizing its layers across various levels while pinpointing avenues for policy intervention and identifying key stakeholders and influences (Amador-Jimenez et al., 2024; Kolleck et al., 2017; Tindall et al., 2023). Essential for addressing soil biodiversity loss and climate change are effective policies and governance mechanisms spanning local, national, and international spheres. Relatedly, effective policies require tractable economic mechanisms in general (e.g., Brock & Xepapadeas, 2003; Metrick & Weitzman, 1998; Weitzman, 1992) and financial markets to value biodiversity losses in particular (Karolyi & Tobin-de La Puente, 2023). Importantly, as people get richer and ecosystems become scarcer due to climate change and environmental degradation, the economic valuation of climate and biodiversity benefits to people should increase over time (Drupp & Hänsel, 2021; Drupp et al., 2024). Governments, regulatory bodies, and international entities have the power to enact legislation, regulations, publication requirements, and incentives that bolster sustainable land use, safeguard natural habitats, and mitigate greenhouse gas emissions (Christensen et al., 2021; McDonald et al., 2023). These governance regimes need to be well-designed and inclusive to be effective (Bartkowski et al., 2021;



Paul et al., 2023), also taking into account connections across different actors (Williams et al., 2023) and their behavioral heterogeneity (Huber et al., 2024; Swart et al., 2023). Perceived fairness and effectiveness of such policy measures and trust in implementing institutions will determine their acceptance by citizens (Bergquist et al., 2022). Businesses and industries can also contribute to addressing soil biodiversity loss and climate change by implementing corporate sustainability policies. By advocating for enhanced environmental safeguards, endorsing sustainable development goals, and backing multilateral agreements, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), society can wield significant influence over policy-making processes.

3. **Innovation and technology:** Harnessing innovation and technology can accelerate efforts to mitigate soil biodiversity loss and climate change by developing sustainable solutions, enhancing monitoring and assessment capabilities, and facilitating knowledge sharing and collaboration. Advances across scientific disciplines and technologies, including soil science, remote sensing, digital and vertical as well as hydroponic agriculture (Kabir et al., 2023; Kannan et al., 2022), robotics and artificial intelligence, next-generation harvesters able to deal with mixed crops, and renewable energy monitoring, can provide new tools and approaches for sustainable land management, climate mitigation, and adaptation. Technologies for future carbon cycles are necessary to reach net zero targets but may come along with manifold risks (Borchers et al., 2024). By investing into research and development, supporting entrepreneurship, and fostering inter- and transdisciplinary collaboration, society can drive technological innovation and promote the adoption of sustainable practices and technologies.
4. **Consumer choices and lifestyles:** Individual consumers and groups of consumers also play a role in mitigating soil biodiversity loss and climate change through their everyday choices and lifestyles. Individual diets influence future land-use intensity (Chan et al., 2022), and they have important consequences for the economic feasibility of diversification options in agricultural production (Gütschow et al., 2021). By making sustainable choices in food, energy, transportation, and consumption behaviors, individuals and certain groups of people can reduce their environmental footprint, and support businesses and products that prioritize environmental sustainability. By advocating for sustainable practices, demanding transparency and accountability from companies, and participating in community initiatives, individuals can contribute to collective efforts to address soil biodiversity loss and climate change (Bamberg et al., 2015; Zacher et al., 2023).
5. **Awareness, education, and collective intention building:** Increasing public awareness and understanding of the importance of soil biodiversity and climate change, and their potential effects on human health (Liebal et al., 2024) is essential for fostering a culture of environmental stewardship and sustainability (Bach

et al., 2020). By fostering climate education and education for sustainable development, we can enhance people's awareness and understanding of the interconnectedness between soil biodiversity loss, climate change, and sustainable land-management practices. Through education, individuals are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to actively address these pressing environmental challenges, fostering a culture of environmental stewardship and sustainability for present and future generations (e.g., Kolleck & Yemini, 2020; Kolleck, 2019). However, increasing problem awareness and knowledge is only a first step, given the gaps between individual attitudes and behavior (Bamberg & Möser, 2007) as well as individuals' social interdependencies when aiming at protecting nature (Fritsche et al., 2018). As a second step, it is thus crucial to support individual action and the acceptance of soil protection policies to foster and encourage people's sense of collective environmental agency (e.g., pro-environmental social norms and collective efficacy; Fritsche & Masson, 2021) in their self-relevant social groups, such as local and large-scale communities or professional groups (e.g., farmers; Hoppe et al., 2023; Marder et al., 2023).

6. **Inclusion and participation:** More often than not, there is a missing link between community strategies of biodiversity protection and (inter)national stakeholders, researchers, and decision-makers, specifically when it comes to governance and protection schemes in countries of the Global South with both highest levels of biodiversity and effects of climate change (Ide et al., 2023). Yet, social systems and ecosystems form a mutually dependent yet interwoven and complex relationship at the local level. Still, both research and policy rely solely on improved communication but largely ignore local knowledge, experiences, and cultural practices of local groups, e.g. indigenous communities (Amador-Jimenez et al., 2024). Systematic inclusion and participation of these often marginalized groups are key to overcoming the nature-culture divide that often undermines effective biodiversity protection, especially when it comes to the protection of soil biodiversity (Phillips et al., 2020).

5 | THE TOP 10 RESEARCH FRONTIERS RELATED TO THE SOIL BIODIVERSITY-CLIMATE CHANGE-SOCIETY NEXUS

1. **Soil carbon dynamics:** Investigate the drivers of soil carbon dynamics in response to climate change and soil biodiversity loss, including changes in soil biological activity, decomposition rates, and soil erosion, to improve predictions of future soil carbon storage and greenhouse gas emissions. A promising step forward would be to establish or extend standardized soil monitoring initiatives (Guerra et al., 2021; Orgiazzi et al., 2018) to understand the spatial and temporal dynamics of soil carbon dynamics and combine those with experimental work on potential main drivers



- (Delgado-Baquerizo et al., 2020; Sünnemann et al., 2023) and their combined effects on soils (Rillig et al., 2019, 2023).
2. **Ecosystem resilience:** Explore the role of soil biodiversity in enhancing ecosystem resilience to climate change, including its effects on nutrient cycling, water retention, and carbon sequestration, to inform strategies for ecosystem management and adaptation. Again, combining information from observational and experimental sources will be key to understanding ecosystem responses to climate change (Sáez-Sandino et al., 2023) and model the future vulnerability as well as buffering capacities of soils. Moreover, biodiverse soils may enhance ecosystem resilience by providing natural protection against plant, animal, and human pathogens (Wall et al., 2015).
 3. **Sustainable land management:** Evaluate the effectiveness of land management practices proposed as more sustainable, such as intercropping, soil inoculation, agroforestry, organic farming, and conservation agriculture, in mitigating soil biodiversity loss, enhancing soil carbon sequestration and soil fertility, regulating greenhouse gas emissions, and promoting ecosystem resilience and multifunctionality (Scherzinger et al., 2023). Here, the development of large-scale trials and continuous monitoring may be crucial to shed light on potential joint environmental and social benefits of sustainable land management. For instance, a recent meta-study across 2,655 farms worldwide showed that applying multiple diversification strategies creates more positive outcomes than individual management strategies alone (Rasmussen et al., 2024).
 4. **Feedback mechanisms:** Investigate feedback mechanisms between soil biodiversity loss and climate change, such as the impacts of climate change on soil biodiversity and the subsequent effects on soil moisture, carbon sequestration, soil fertility, and ecosystem multifunctionality. Addressing such feedback mechanisms would require the development of adequate observational and modeling capabilities and include multiple potential mechanisms, such as greenhouse gas (Paustian et al., 2016) and volatile (Eisenhauer & Weigelt, 2021; Werner et al., 2021) emissions as well as erosion processes (Tegen & Schepanski, 2009).
 5. **Integrating the role of soil biodiversity in different modeling schemes:** Develop integrated modeling schemes that incorporate system-relevant aspects of soil biodiversity dynamics, climate change impacts and feedback, and societal responses—for example consumer behavior and land user's decision making—to better understand the complex interactions between these factors and their implications for sustainability. Agent-based models are a promising avenue to describe these complex relations.
 6. **Technological innovations:** Explore technological innovations, such as remote sensing, digital and vertical agriculture, and precision farming, for monitoring soil biodiversity, assessing soil carbon stocks, and implementing sustainable land-management practices at large scales. Modern information technologies can also help consumers to make more informed choices.
 7. **Community engagement:** Investigate the formation and role of community engagement and participatory approaches in promoting soil conservation, biodiversity protection, and climate resilience, including the effectiveness of education campaigns, outreach programs, community-supported agriculture, and citizen science initiatives. Ultimately, such work could target land managers, practitioners, and consumers.
 8. **Consumer behavior:** Examine the influence of consumer behavior and lifestyle choices on soil biodiversity loss and climate change, including adopting sustainable consumption patterns, support for environmentally friendly products, and demand for ethically sourced food and goods. Technological innovations (point 6) may play a role here. Also, investigate the personal and collective conditions under which people change their individual behavior and accept pro-ecological policies.
 9. **Policy and governance:** Evaluate the acceptance and impact of policy and governance mechanisms on mitigating soil biodiversity loss and climate change. This encompasses governance and the creation of collective agency at various levels: locally, where initiatives such as community-supported agriculture provide incentives for sustainable land management; regionally and nationally, where social movements and networks play a crucial role, alongside the development of regulations and economic incentives; and internationally, through agreements aimed at promoting sustainable land use and biodiversity conservation.
 10. **Interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research:** Foster interdisciplinary research collaborations among scientists as well as between scientists, policymakers, practitioners, local communities, and stakeholders to address the complex challenges of soil biodiversity loss, climate change, and societal responses, integrating insights from ecology, agriculture, climate research, economics, sociology, meteorology, psychology, conflict studies, and other disciplines (Amador-Jimenez et al., 2024; Bartkowski et al., 2023; Kelly et al., 2019). Promising approaches may be the development of real-world labs in the context of transformation research (Horcea-Milcu, 2022).

6 | CONCLUDING REMARKS

In conclusion, soil is deeply involved in the interplay between biodiversity, climate change, and human society. As a major reservoir of biodiversity, soil supports essential ecosystem functions and services that sustain life on Earth. Moreover, soil is a critical carbon sink and regulator of the global carbon cycle and greenhouse gas emissions, influencing climate regulation and feedback mechanisms. However, ongoing changes in biodiversity and climate pose significant threats to soil health and ecosystem functioning, with profound implications for human well-being and sustainability. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts to conserve soil biodiversity, promote sustainable land management practices, and mitigate climate change, thereby safeguarding the vital role of soil in



supporting biodiversity, climate regulation, and human society. By adopting integrated approaches that prioritize soil conservation, sustainable land management, and climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies, we can enhance ecosystem resilience, safeguard essential ecosystem services, and build a more resilient and sustainable future for generations to come. Society is vital in mitigating soil biodiversity loss and climate change through awareness raising, sustainable land management, policy advocacy, innovation, and individual action. By prioritizing interdisciplinary research in these areas based on the top 10 research frontiers outlined in this paper, scientists can advance our understanding of the soil biodiversity–climate change–society nexus and inform evidence-based strategies for promoting environmental sustainability, resilience, and social equity.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We acknowledge funding by the Saxon State Ministry for Science, Culture and Tourism (SMWK) – [3-7304/35/6-2021/48880] in the context of the Breathing Nature initiative at Leipzig University. Moreover, we acknowledge additional support from the German Centre for Integrative Biodiversity Research Halle–Jena–Leipzig, funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG; FZT 118 – FZT 118, 202548816), as well as by the DFG (Ei 862/29-1). Open Access funding enabled and organized by Projekt DEAL.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

This is a review paper and does not contain any primary data.

ETHICS STATEMENT

We comply with all aspects of the Wiley's Best Practice Guidelines on Research Integrity and Publishing Ethics and the Committee on Publication Ethics' guidance.

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How to cite this article: Eisenhauer N, Frank K, Weigelt A, Bartkowski B, Beugnon R, Liebal K, et al. A belowground perspective on the nexus between biodiversity change, climate change, and human well-being. *J Sustain Agric Environ*. 2024;3:e212108. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sae2.12108>