

**SOCIOLOGY IN TIMES OF SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL CRISES,  
TRANSFORMATIONS AND DISLOCATIONS.  
IN SEARCH FOR A NEW VOCABULARY**

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It has been 46 years since Catton & Dunlap's (1978) seminal call for a paradigm shift in sociology, which would revisit the foundations of the discipline by introducing questions of materiality, ecology, and resources, and position sociology as a crucial voice in the unfolding environmental crisis. Since then, a considerable body of sociological work has addressed environmental problems, explored socioecological conflicts, and charted pathways to sustainability.

However, the core of the discipline has remained surprisingly detached from these critical issues. A review of publications in leading sociological journals reveals a continued paucity of articles engaging with ecological questions (Diekmann 2024, Hiltner 2024). Moreover, the rich sociological literature that has centered on issues of sustainability and socio-ecological transformation still remains marginalized within mainstream policy debates and expertise bodies, as evidenced for example by its notorious under-representation in the assessments of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (Lövbrand et al. 2015, Beck und Mahony 2017, Borie et al. 2021).

This special issue aims to address this gap. We believe that the current situation of escalating ecological, social and democratic crises, transformations, dramatic

shifts, and upheavals warrants more than ever strong sociological perspectives. We also believe that the first step to forge such perspectives consists in forging a sociological vocabulary that can effectively articulate and analyze the ongoing disruptions and upheavals associated with the ecological crisis – both those associated with the growing impacts of climate change and ecological breakdown and those resulting from attempts to implement transformations to climate neutrality and sustainability.

Such a vocabulary has to start from a thorough and lucid diagnosis of the current situation that does not confuse the desirable with the analytical. For example, ongoing processes of transformation seldom resemble smooth transitions to sustainability. Instead, they often involve disruptive shifts, conflicts, and are punctuated by backlash. They produce dislocations that intervene in the very fabric of our societies and social life, raising issues related to democracy, participation in public life, social structure and power asymmetries, affecting classifications and economic valuation regimes, and redefining rights, obligations, larger questions of meaning and the possibility of a future (Adloff et al. 2024). Against this backdrop, we invite contributions that propose theoretical clarifications and empirical explorations of the current situation, along the following lines:

- 1. Challenges to the modernization paradigm:** Progress, master trends and development continue to form an – often implicit – subtext of contemporary sociological thinking. However, core elements of the modernization paradigm, from individualization to functional differentiation, are increasingly destabilized and called into question in the ecological crisis, where societies search for collective responses to ecological limits (Adloff 2024).
- 2. Exploring Non-linear Trajectories:** Concepts such as metamorphosis (Beck 2016), mutation (Latour 2021) and AnthroShift (Fisher 2022) have been proposed to capture the non-linearities associated with the socio-ecological crises. But do they adequately capture the uncertainties and radical openness of the current situation, and the open-ended nature of future developments? What alternative concepts can be used to think present shifts and disruptions? How can historical sociology help in such an endeavor, through novel forms of analyzing major past disruptions (Wagner 2024)?
- 3. Considering Loss, Brokenness, and Repair:** A “sociology of loss” has recently been proposed (Elliott 2018, Reckwitz 2024), but has not yet systematically shaped debates around the possibilities, and limits, of transformation. How to relate emerging works on brokenness, irreversible loss and their affective and

political life to the broader concern with the destruction of the “conditions of habitability” (Latour und Schultz 2022) on this planet? Ultimately this also means to ask how European sociology can learn from writings on loss, repair, and ‘struggles for what’s left’ in places that have long been hit by multiple crises, including of annihilation and coloniality (Maurer 2024).

- 4. Imagining the Future:** Finally, what’s left of the idea of the future? What vocabulary for thinking contemporary practices, scenarios and imaginaries of the future (Hentschel 2022, Engels und Marotzke 2023) and how to understand their embeddedness in power asymmetries along class, gender, racial, and national lines (Aykut et al. 2022)? How has the future been dislocated from current struggles in (post-)apocalyptic forms of activism (Cassegård und Thörn 2018), and what forms of veritable transformation of the social imaginary (Lessenich 2022) can we discern?

We welcome contributions that offer innovative theoretical propositions, critical analyses, and speculative perspectives that can enrich the sociological dialogue on ecological issues.  
Contributions should be in English.

Please send your abstracts to [zukuenfte.der.nachhaltigkeit@uni-hamburg.de](mailto:zukuenfte.der.nachhaltigkeit@uni-hamburg.de) by **14 April 2025**.

## Timeline

**14 April 2025:** Deadline abstracts

**23 April 2025:** Decision on abstracts by guest editors

**End of December 2025:** Submission of first full draft to guest editors

**End of January 2026:** Editorial workshop at “Futures of Sustainability” at  
University of Hamburg & feedback on first drafts

**May 2026:** Submission of new draft to guest editors, begin peer review

**October 2026:** Final articles sent to *Soziale Welt*

**Spring 2027:** Publication

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