

Why environmental sociology?

As the scale of human intervention in the Earth's ecosystems and climate grows, and as the magnitude of risk associated with global environmental change becomes clearer, it seems inconceivable that any social science could ignore the relationships between environment and society. Selfevidently, failure to engage with environmental change would be to miss a major consequence, and driver, of social change. Just as importantly, failure to engage with environmental change would see opportunities go begging to participate in progressive social and political action. For the sake of both validity and relevance, sociology needs to 'ecologize'.

It is not necessarily obvious, however, that the best way for sociology (or any other social science for that matter) to engage with environmental change is by institutionalizing a distinct 'environmental' sub-discipline. The challenge raised by global environmental change to neat conceptual distinctions between the social and natural worlds demands more of us than occasional multidisciplinary collaboration. Global environmental change demands outright disciplinary promiscuity and the exploration of entirely new ways of doing science.¹ For the sake, again, of both validity and relevance, sociologists need to engage in deep and sustained partnerships with colleagues across the sciences (and across 'layperson'/'policy-maker'/'scientist' divides) while assessing altogether more critically our own theoretical and methodological foundations.

Why then cultivate an explicitly environmental sociology? And why dedicate a journal to this project? The short answer is that while global problems demand better ways of bringing subject and disciplinary specializations together they do not demand such specialization be abandoned. Quite the contrary. Like any complex problem, understanding the multiple dimensions of environmental change requires close and obsessive attention to detail from multiple perspectives. Bringing disciplinary perspectives together is something of a specialization in itself apparent in integrative fields such as human ecology and sustainability science (see Tabara 2014).

Environmental sociology is needed within this milieu – as a body of knowledge and as a vocation – to develop, apply and communicate insights unique to the sociological imagination.

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