

Call for Papers

A Climate of (De-)Civilization? Shifting Dynamics between Nature and Society

TU Dortmund University, March 12-14, 2025

In recent years, environmental issues have gained increased attention in sociological research and theory. In particular, Norbert Elias' process (also called figurational) sociology has proven to be fertile ground for the development of *Denkwerkzeuge* (thinking tools), concepts and theories for studying socio-environmental relations (e.g., triad of basic controls, fantasy-reality continuum, Elias' sociology of knowledge). Despite this, and the pioneering work of scholars like Johan Goudsblom and his students, process sociological perspectives remain largely unknown in environmental sociology and related fields. The conference *A Climate of (De-)Civilization: Shifting Dynamics between Nature and Society* aims to explore the value of process sociology for the study of socio-environmental crises at multiple levels, related societal conflicts, and sustainability issues in general.

Thematically, the conference focuses on current socio-environmental crises (e.g., climate change, biodiversity loss, land-use, soil loss and degradation, pollution, ecological overshoot, and more) as manifestations of a destructive exploitation of natural resources and environmental services. Though global in scope, efforts to mitigate these problems and deal with their impacts span multiple levels, from local to international. Accompanying these efforts are various forms of social conflict, also at multiple levels. In international negotiations, for instance, there is controversy over state responsibilities to mount and finance mitigation efforts and compensate for damages and losses. Within states, conflicts between supporters and opponents and perceived "winners" and "losers" of socio-ecological transformation efforts have intensified. Particularly in the Global South (but not only there) environmental activists have increasingly been prosecuted and even become victims of physical violence.

Using technology in tackling environmental crises often reveals a Janus-faced character. For instance, artificial intelligence (AI) and further digital technologies are increasingly being used to mitigate climate change and detect environmental degradation, and yet AI processing has a massive carbon footprint. Similar ambivalences are constitutive for other mitigation policies relying on technologies, too (e.g. nuclear power, battery electric vehicle, or "green hydrogen"). Nevertheless, such "technological solutions" are dominant in most political and societal discourses; rather than incorporating greater self-restraint in relation to human consumption activities. Because issues of climate change mitigation as well as environmental degradation are related to almost every aspect of modern life (e.g., mobility, nutrition, housing, etc.), questions of ecological sustainability regularly turn into struggles

over lifestyle. And recent research on phenomena like “eco anxiety,” “environmental grief,” and “flight shame” indicates shifts and inner conflicts at the psychological level, too. Overall, the disastrous impacts of gradual global warming and disruptive large-scale changes in earth systems mean that humanity at large may be returning to a state of heightened threat from extra-human events in a catastrophic form. From an Eliasian perspective, the unfolding of the climate catastrophe would be the basis for weakened societal controls as well as weakened self-control. In short, it could contribute to processes of de-civilization. All these issues cursorily sketched here, illustrate the value of a process sociological framework for shedding important light on the human predicament.

Generally, process sociological approaches incorporate long-term perspectives as well as the interdependencies between changes on the social level on the one hand and changes on the level of habitus on other hand. We encourage scholars to submit contributions that apply an Eliasian framework (in a broad understanding), both theoretically and in empirical research. Please note, the terms “ecological crisis”, “nature” and “climate” are also conceptualized in a wide manner and comprise numerous issues that can be subsumed under these terms.

Potential topics for contributions include:

- Long-term Environmental Change and Civilization
- Current Ecological Crises (Climate Change, Biodiversity Loss, etc.) and Civilization
- The Fantasy-Reality Continuum in Human/Non-Human Relations
- The relationship between societal changes and mentalities
- Gender, Ecology & Environmental Movements
- Post-Colonial Perspectives on Civilization Theory and Nature
- Emotional Sociology
- Long-Term Change of Power Relations and Interdependencies
- Behavior, Emotions & Sustainability
- Climate Jurisdiction, Law & Nature
- Global Interdependencies & International Relations against the Background of Planetary Ecological Relations
- Science, Technology, and Nature
- Sociological Perspectives on Sustainability Transitions
- Human-Animal-Relations
- Violence & Nature

Some funding is available to cover travel expenses for a limited number of participants, especially early career researchers without institutional funding. Please indicate if your participation depends on this funding.

Send an abstract (max. 300 words) together with a CV (100 words) to eliasconference.fk17@tu-dortmund.de by 30 November, 2024. Successful applicants will be contacted by the organizers by 20 December.

Organizers include: Marta Bucholc (University of Warsaw, Poland), Debbie Kasper (Hiram College, Ohio), André Saramago (University of Coimbra, Portugal) & Bernd Sommer (TU Dortmund University, Germany).