Four Decades of Environmental Sociology
Guest Editors' Foreword

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Environmental sociology can be considered a relatively new area of sociological investigation: the discipline emerged in the 1970s, strongly linked to the societal attention directed towards environmental problems in Western nations, particularly in the USA. As the founders of the discipline (e.g. Dunlap and Catton, 1979; see also Dunlap, 2000) assume, the first attempts of investigations were less specific and innovative, since they focused on the study of public opinion around environmental problems and on the analysis of the profile of those people who engaged in environmental movements. Later on, however, scholars began to be concerned about deeper societal – environmental interactions, like the social embeddedness of pollution and of other environmental problems. The recognition of this interdependence – which is also the core idea of the so-called 'New Environmental Paradigm' (Dunlap and Van Liere, 1978), the first major epistemic and methodological viewpoint of the discipline – helped not only the professionalization and diversification of the studies labelled as environmental sociology, but also enhanced the acceptance of the new discipline by the wider sociology, for whom – along the Durkheimian legacy – environmental and biological variables constituted nearly sociological taboos. The continuous emergence of newer environmental

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problems added further arguments to the legitimacy of this new discipline, which thus rapidly developed into one of the most dynamic areas of sociology.

Strongly linked to the appearance of new environmental problems and to the social and sociological challenges represented by these problems, environmental sociology has rapidly gave rise to various approaches, both in terms of epistemology and methodology. The investigation of people's concern towards the environment in terms of values, attitudes and behaviours (an inquiry which consists mostly in survey-based quantitative approaches aiming at revealing on various geographic scales the emergence of environmentalism), was rapidly completed by studies focusing on the issue of environmental justice or racism (e.g. the presence of waste landfills and hazardous pollutants in those areas which were inhabited by the poorest social strata) and by analyses of the emergence and development of local, regional, national or international level environmental movements. In parallel and inseparably linked to the appearance of new, less localizable, 'global' environmental problems (see Dunlap and Jones, 2002) environmental sociology began to take a macro-level approach and started institutional level inquiries of 'environmental change', in strong connection with other disciplines, e.g. policy, economics, etc. Approaches like 'environmental governance', 'sustainable development', ecological modernization' are only a few examples in this latter regard (for an overview of various concepts, theories and approaches of environmental sociology see for instance Redclift

and Woodgate, 1997; 2010; Mayerfeld Bell, 2004; Pretty, 2007; Gross and Heinrichs, 2010).

Four decades from its constitution, today's environmental sociology can be regarded as a 'young but mature' discipline and *a sine qua non* area of sociological investigation. Besides the above arguments it is worth to mention that the three major sociological associations – the International Sociological Association (ISA), the American Sociological Association (ASA) and the European Sociological Association (ESA) – all have dynamic networks of environmental sociology and environmental sociologists usually are among the most visible presence of the conferences organized by these associations. Moreover, well-established journals like *Environment and Behavior*, *Human Ecology Review, The Journal of Environmental Education, Nature and Culture*, etc. (for a comprehensive list see: http://envirosoc.org/journals.php) are further evidence for the dynamics and topic-richness of the discipline.

In this context, it was a huge challenge and exciting endeavour to host a special issue of *International Review of Social Research* dedicated to environmental sociology. Given the diversity of approaches we've just mentioned above, we stopped at the issue title 'Environmental Values and Environmental Change' which we thought to be sufficiently broad for including micro- and macro-level oriented approaches from various areas of the discipline, based on multiple methodologies and various geographical backgrounds.

Looking back, we conclude that the pieces we finally selected based

on the comments and suggestions of our reviewers can give a short, but in the same time comprehensive picture about the various research directions existing in environmental sociology, and are also quite diverse in their topic selections, methodology and geographical localization to constitute a valuable block of articles equally intriguing for environmental sociologists and other scholars.

The issue begins with the review article of André Schaffrin, 'No Measure without Concept', in which the author summarizes some of the main assumptions regarding the key-concept of environmental sociology, i.e. 'environmental concern'. As far as the present special issue is not dedicated exclusively for the community of environmental sociologists, we assume that Schaffrin's review might be a good summary for those readers who are not very familiar with the field of environmental sociology and who thus can get a sight into the history, as well as conceptualization and measurement challenges of this concept. Environmental sociologists, on the other hand, can get new insights through the author's integrative approach in which various facets and dimensions of the concepts are brought together both in the form of a synthetic definition and both in forms of several visualization schemes.

The following four articles, however are dealing with both conceptually and geographically specific topics (i.e. the emergence and development of Russian environmental movement in connection with the Baikal issue; the attitudes of the Turin-resident, Italian citizens towards a waste co-incinerator; the representations and

practices connected to the overuse in the French Calanques and the case-study of an agroecological movement from western Mexico) are approaching, after all, various facets of environmental risk and justice. By reading these pieces, the reader can easily conclude that the Russian environmental movement has evolved from a purely environmental struggle towards a more comprehensive socio-environmental movement fighting for human and environmental justice in the context of a political establishment hostile towards environmental mobilization; the Turin co-incinerator raises the issues of the well-known 'Not In My Backyard' or 'Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anything' as attributes of struggles against risky investments; the overuse of nature in the French Calanques brings forward the problem of nature overuse and the necessity of nature protection, however the ways in which conservation plans are envisaged induce clashing between various user groups and raise the issue of marginalization from nature which constitutes, again, an issue of justice. Finally, the struggle of Mexican rural residents for sustainable development and fair trade practices stands as a social movement in the name of the right to give small communities the chance for organizing themselves in a bottom-up manner. In the followings, let us mention these four articles in brief.

Oleg Yanitsky in his article, 'The Struggle in Defence of Baikal: The Shift of Values and Disposition of Forces' summarizes the results of two decades of systematically organized case study research on the long-term Russian environmental conflict around

the building of a paper mill in the town Baykalsk, ashore the lake. In the author's view, the construction of the pulp and paper mill and the civic opposition it has generated coincide with the beginning of the Russian environmental movement. In this sense, Yanitsky's study, which in fact draws a picture on the emergence, development and reconfiguration of the Russian environmental movement can be well placed near those studies which revealed the emergence of environmental movements in other East-Central European countries, strongly associated with the opposition to communist industrial development initiatives (e.g. it is particularly illustrative the emergence of the Hungarian environmental movement during the 1980s as an opposition towards the Danube dam project at Gabcikovo – Nagymaros – see Fleischer, 1992).

Yanitsky separates six distinct phases of the Baikal conflict, beginning from the construction of the paper mill in the 1960s, through the perestroika and the 1990s, up until nowadays' economic crisis. While in the first stage of the conflict, i.e. around the period of construction until the mid-1980s, the most important forces of opposition were the government, on the one hand, and the scientific community, on the other hand; later on, during the perestroika, the struggle in defence of Baikal has gained strength and has been transformed into an environmental movement involving not only national, but international actors as well. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, international donors have contributed to further diversify and strengthen the Baikal movement which thus can be regarded, also through the more and more visible participation of the mass public, as a tool for bottom up civic initiatives and democratic activism. The post-1990s and 2000s history of the movement is marked by both professionalization (e.g. in terms of developing projects on the sustainable use of the Baikal area) and both by harsh conflicts between the state and environmental actors, conflicts which are rooted in the greens opposition against the tracing of an oil pipe-line near Baikal. All in all, as Yanitsky observes, the struggle in defence of Baikal can be regarded as a continuous conflict between risk-producers and risk-consumers and the development of the environmental movement portrays, on a larger level, the shift from a localized, regional movement concerned mainly with environmental issues to an international, de-localized (i.e. network-like) struggle for ecological, economical and political justice in accordance with the new risks of the high modernity.

Giuseppe Tipaldo takes a quantitative approach in his article titled 'Among 'Bananas' and 'Backyards': A Statistical Analysis of the Effect of Risk and Scientific Literacy on the Attitude towards A Waste Co-Incinerator in Italy' when he explores the case of a specific environmental risk and conflict, that is waste incinerators located in inhabited areas (i.e. NIMBY, LULU or BANANA type risks). By taking the case of the Turin co-incinerator and based on the results of a survey research, Tipaldo investigates the attitudes towards the co-incinerator, respectively towards its implicit risks. The author takes a very original, double perspective on

risk and separates, both on the basis of theoretical and empirical arguments, between a collective and individual dimension of risk, the first consisting in those aspects of risk which are outside individuals' control (e.g. industrial plants, co-incinerators), while the latter are individual-level, lifestyle related, voluntary choices (e.g. smoking). By using binomial logistic regression analyses, the author demonstrates that while controlling for variables like socio-demographics, trust, forms of media exposition and type of political culture in decision making, the collective dimension of risk has a positive association with a critical attitude towards the Turin co-incinerator, while the individual dimension of risk has a negative association. Thus, results indicate – as the author himself concludes – that 'a single risk may be raised to a collective topic as well as a general issue (initially experienced as more remote) may also be transformed into an urgent concern for individuals' once risk is not considered a uni-dimensional construct. In the empirical model, the author checked also the relevance of the so-called knowledge deficit model and showed that scientific literacy has no significant impact on the attitudes towards the co-incinerator, i.e. it cannot be assumed that scientifically more informed citizens are more critical towards the incinerator that those citizens who lack scientific knowledge or, differently put, the authors' data do not constitute an argument towards the frequently heard assumption of the experts according to which – as Tipaldo observes – 'if citizens were more literate on technical and scientific issues, they would inevitably conclude that experts are right and that their skewed risk perception is not plausible'.

Cecilia Claeys and her co-authors in their article 'Protected Areas and Overuse in the Context of Socio-Natural Changes: An Interdisciplinary French Case Study', take us out in nature, in the beautiful French Calanques Massif and discuss the issue of overuse, i.e. the excessive use of the area and the need for its protection. Their approach is both qualitative and quantitative, in the sense that it is based on participatory observations and interviews with the users of the Calanques and also on a questionnaire survey among the inhabitants of Marseilles. According to the authors, walking and swimming are the two most frequent activities in the Calanques which thus generate the highest amount of overuse. Interestingly, the perspectives of the 'users' are very heterogeneous, depending on which part of the floor they are situated. Such different perspectives can be regarded also in terms of conflicts between different stakeholders and users. The most important groups, which possess also different representations about overuse and protection are: 1) politicians, for whom the Calanques massif – based especially on electoral reasons – is represented as an 'area of freedom' which does not necessarily need additional protection or restricted usage; 2) managers and professionals, who claim restricted use; 3) user groups, who advocate environmentally friendly, however not restrictive use and 4) new generation of scientists and managers, who advocate inclusive use, in accordance with social demands. On the other hand, general public does not

represent the Calanques as an overused terrain and requires further free usage. Consequently, it is not a surprise that the Calanques is witnessing the signs of appropriation and gentrification, two processes which refer to a relatively new type of – mostly sedentary – use of nature by middle-class residents from Marseilles.

Based on participative observation and other qualitative methods, Peter R. W. Gerritsen brings forward a case study which summarizes those bottom-up initiatives which were taken by farmers from western Mexico within the framework of the Network for Sustainable Agricultural Alternatives (RASA) in order to promote sustainable agriculture and fair-trade practices. 'Creating (Local) Space for Change' is thus an article which introduces the reader into endogenous approaches to rural development. The author frames his study into the actor – agency approach and assumes that local farmers from the Jalisco area of western Mexico can be thought as actors who recognized their 'agency', that is their ability to fulfil their particular needs and objectives through specific projects and grass roots initiatives. Consequently, these farmers set up the RASA movement in whose framework they are trying to strengthen agroecology and fair trade practices. It is worthy of note that farmers' struggles and initiatives are strongly linked, challenged and sometimes obstructed by such macro-level social transformations as the process of decentralization, civil society development in general, the crisis of several rural development policies, etc. In this context, the RASA's 'agency' becomes an example

for a socially embedded bottom-up community project, which aims to create a space for farmers' needs within the wider social and political arena of Mexico.

The second block of articles comprises two pieces which are dealing with households' energy-related behaviours in three East-Central European contexts. It is rejoicing to note that while one of the studies takes a quantitative, survey based approach on the subject, the other adopts qualitative investigation and, consequently, the two studies nicely complete and nuance each other.

'Environmental Attitudes and Household Electricity Use among Budapest Residents', the article written by Andrea Dúll and Béla Janky represents the quantitative approach, while Françoise Bartiaux and her co-authors sign the qualitative study titled 'Knowledge on Climate Change and Energy Saving Renovations by Apartment Owners in Bulgaria and Latvia'. The study of Dúll and Janky was undertaken this year among a sample of residents from a specific part of Budapest. The authors investigated if there can be modelled a positive relationship between environmental attitudes and household energy consumption practices in this specific, East-Central European context as it has been previously signalled in the case of advanced, post-industrial societies. Differently put, this study can be framed into the 'environmental concern' study flow of the discipline, as far as it investigates citizens pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours, respectively the link between these two variables. The authors' conclusion is that while

it is possible to reveal a positive attitude – behaviour relationship in the case of Budapest residents, socio-demographical background is more important than environmental attitudes in explaining the variance of the dependent variable, i.e. household energy consumption. Thus, it can be concluded that Budapest residents' energy saving behaviour is much more a choice rooted in economical constraints – or on the contrary, in economical resources understood here as preference for consumerism from the part of the middle class – than in environmental concerns.

Bartiaux and her co-authors, while focusing on a different aspect of household-level energy-related behaviour, i.e. energy saving renovation works in Bulgaria and Latvia, are mainly concerned with the role of environmental knowledge in initiating such kinds of home-upgrading works. As their qualitative data show, climate change related knowledge is a much more implicit than explicit reason of the renovation works and inhabitants are especially motivated in realizing these renovations by their economical constraints (i.e. having smaller utility bills), needs for comfort (i.e. to have a cosy home) or by external constraints (e.g. cold weather in Latvia). The imperative to limit emissions and, thus, to help the mitigation of climate change is rather a by-effect of this renovations. As a conclusion, Bartiaux et al.'s findings can be well placed near those of Dúll and Janky: in post-communist societies, environmental concern is still only a secondary cause of environmentally friendly practices.

The issue ends with the debate section which raises several issues in connection with 'environmental change' and sociology's role in approaching this change. The debate is initiated around the article of Michael Redclift, 'The Response of Hermeneutic Social Sciences to A "Post-Carbon World" ', in which the author re-calls some of his previous ideas (Redclift, 2009) and discusses possible ways in which social sciences, particularly sociology, fail to respond, respectively should respond to the climate change agenda. Redclift talks about decarbonisation, as the main challenge of the present society and politics, which may be conceived as a learning process both by society and social sciences. However, as the author observes, this learning process is marked by several institutional 'dysfunctions'. One of these is the so-called environmental governance which, in the author's view, albeit proposes an 'improved' way of governing nature, in fact fails to offer concrete solutions for the 'post-carbon' world. Similarly, Redclift reviews post-structural political economy and assumes that within the framework of the 'dual logic' of ecological capital (North vs South) or, differently put, in the context of social and political path dependence, post-carbon challenges need to re-consider the contradictions of capitalism (i.e. cultural and ecological domination), which in our case might generate different speeds of catch-up alongside this learning process, in accordance with the geographical location and/or the patterns of cultural and political establishment.

This latter idea is then further discussed by Raymond Murphy, one of Redclift's discussants in his article 'The Challenge of Anthropogenic Climate

Change for the Social Sciences'. Murphy argues that path dependence or 'developmental channelization' allows the empirical comparison of societies in terms of climate change mitigation. Thus, in the authors' view, the USA on the one hand, and European, particularly Northern European countries on the other, can constitute examples for climate failures, respectively successes. The extremely consistent article of Raymond Murphy, besides the idea of path dependency raises some other imperatives as well, on which social sciences need to concentrate when trying to approach climate change. One of these is the necessity to construct a 'stronger social science', an attempt which must imply the use of absolute material indicators in order to 'reveal the depth of the challenge for society and for social sciences of environmental problems like climate change'. Among others, the author – who is a well-known scholar of environmental disasters – raises the question if resilience (i.e. the capacity to bounce back) can be considered a protective strategy under the context of climate uncertainty. Murphy's conclusion is that 'prevention is preferable to bouncing back' especially in situations when we take into account the role of path dependency, in his approach resilience and adaptation being especially costly approaches in the case of the most climate-vulnerable societies. All in all, he concludes, it would be a double-faced argument from the part of environmental sciences to claim the need for adapting in spite of prevention, since 'letting climate change to happen and adapting is precisely what big emitters have

proposed'.

In the light of Raymond Murphy's collected and dense comment, the piece written on Redclift by Matthias Gross stands as a 'friendly criticism'. In his 'Welcome Frustration with the Climate', albeit recognizing the merits of Redclift's article and considering it as 'an excellent eye opener for sociologists', Gross brings up some shortcomings of the article under discussion. Thus, according to Gross, Redclift fails in clearly discussing the role of sociology in the 'post-carbon world' and thus, he argues, Redclift misses one of the main points of his argumentation leaving the reader without a clear idea about the essence of 'decarbonization'. In the light of these criticisms we, as editors, could do nothing but to expect a further reaction from the part of Michael Redclift in a forthcoming issue of the *International Review of Social Research*, in which the author will let us – as Gross puts it – 'learn more about (…) why he sympathizes with the idea of a post carbon society'.

We re-invite Michael Redclift for a further discussion as much as Fritz Reusswig – Redclift's third discussant – in his essay 'Sociological Tasks in View of the Transition to Post-Carbon Societies' considers also that Redclift should better elaborate on the meaning of the concept of 'post-carbon society'. The reinforcement of the meaning of this concept is as much needed as – according to Reusswig – sociology uses the term in a diffuse nature. The author of this comment on Redclift opens also further areas for discussions by assuming that 'the analysis of the carbon lock-in of modern society, as well as a future oriented look at

possible pathways out of it' should transcend the area of environmental sociology and should imply the thorough re-consideration of the principles of modernity. In this sense, Reusswig considers especially telling the attempts made by sociologists like Anthony Giddens and John Urry. Reusswig's essay, while touches upon challenging terrains (e.g. the re-consideration of the role of capital in leading the transition from carbon-dependence to a post-carbon world; the clashes inherently linked to this transition, for instance between fossil fuel and green energy producers; the debate between axiological neutralism and political implication, etc.) links us back to one of the basic ideas of Raymond Murphy's article, i.e. the case of adaptation. While Murphy advocates prevention instead of adaptation, Reusswig considers both strategies as necessary, mutually interdependent options alongside the transition to the 'post-carbon society'.

While we hope that the articles within the present issue will be able to provide a valuable insight into the various approaches of environmental sociology, we are also grateful for the Editors of the *International Review of Social Research* for hosting this special issue, for the reviewers' evaluations and suggestions regarding the manuscripts we received and, above all, for the authors of the articles for their great studies and patience during the process of revising and editing.

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