

DOES SCIENCE PERPETUATE CRISES? HOW RESEARCH FIELDS CONTRIBUTE TO CHANGE OR CONTINUITIES IN TACKLING SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

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Abstract:

Science is ascribed a transformative role in tackling today's multiple, interrelated socio-ecological crises. According to prevailing narratives and imaginaries in high-level documents (e.g. the Global Sustainable Development Report 2019), generating knowledge, providing evidence, and leveraging innovation stimulates the creation of pathways for tackling challenges like climate change, deforestation, soil degradation, and biodiversity loss both on land and underwater.

Yet, despite the huge increase in available scientific knowledge, these crises persist, with some even worsening. Oftentimes, this paradox is explained through the complex science-society relationships and intricacies of science-policy interactions. Recognising these explanations as central but insufficient, this panel addresses the paradox from a different angle, shifting the spotlight 'inwards': (To what extent) do scientific fields perform their role as drivers of change in times of crisis? Or are they, perhaps, driven by these demands for reactive change instead? How do structural traits and practices of scientific fields contribute to their role in fostering continuity or change? How does the knowledge they generate challenge or stabilise governance arrangements and policy paradigms that have so far struggled to bring about transformation? And how are governance arrangements themselves disruptive or insistent forces?

The panel seeks to provide a space for a critical theoretical and empirical reflection on how and why scholars – including ourselves – from different research fields might contribute to some "striking forms of continuity" (conference theme abstract) in the politics of techno-scientific futures, contrary to their and our own intention.

Key words:

Socio-ecological crises; scientific practices; governance