Stream #15

Transformative Social Policy in Times of Climate Change

Conveners:

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Climate change is reshaping the terrain of social policy. As climate risks, ecological degradation, and social inequalities increasingly intersect, conventional welfare approaches that focus on ex-post compensation or narrowly defined poverty alleviation appear insufficient. This stream builds on the conceptual framework developed in the forthcoming edited volume "Transformative Social Policy in Times of Climate Change: Evidence from Around the World", and invites contributions that engage with eco-social policies as a transformative response to the climate crisis, asking how social policy can simultaneously address social injustice, ecological sustainability, and entrenched power relations. Drawing on the concept of Transformative Social Policy (TSP), the stream moves beyond incremental or adaptive approaches to explore policies that tackle the structural and historically produced drivers of vulnerability, inequality, and environmental harm. Central to this perspective is the argument that social policies can only be considered fully transformative in times of climate change when they not only enhance social protection and climate adaptation, but also contribute – directly or indirectly – to climate mitigation and to rebalancing socio-economic power structures.

The stream welcomes interdisciplinary contributions that critically examine eco-social policies across diverse welfare regimes and development contexts, in both the Global North and the Global South. Relevant topics include (but are not limited to): access to essential resources (such as energy, water, food, land and housing); minimum and maximum income policies, including debates on limitarianism, wealth caps and climate reparations; cash transfers and social protection instruments redesigned for climate resilience and sustainability; just transition policies and social dimensions of decarbonisation; and institutional, political and cultural barriers to eco-social transformation. We particularly encourage papers that engage with historical, political economy and governance perspectives,

highlighting how current eco-social arrangements are shaped by past policy choices, growth-oriented paradigms, and extractive development models. Contributions may address questions such as: What makes an eco-social policy genuinely (ecologically) transformative rather than merely compensatory? Under what conditions can social policies contribute to mitigation rather than reinforcing high-carbon development paths? How do power relations, state capacities, and social coalitions enable or constrain eco-social transformation?

Methodologically, the stream is open to qualitative, quantitative, historical and mixed-methods approaches, as well as conceptual and comparative work. By fostering dialogue between social policy research, climate governance, ecological economics and development studies, the stream aims to advance debates on new eco-social contracts and the role of social policy in steering societies towards socially just and ecologically viable futures.