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Review of the book **Environmental Sociology and Social Transformation: Key issues**, by M. Boström and R. Lidskog

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BOOK REVIEW

Boström, M. and Lidskog, R. (2024). *Environmental Sociology and Social Transformation: Key issues*. Routledge. Paperback ISBN: 9781032606538, eBook ISBN: 9781032628189. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781032628189>



The global environmental crisis intensifies social, economic, and political challenges, highlighting the urgent need for transformative action to protect the planet and promote equity, particularly for marginalized communities disproportionately affected by ecological damage (Hackmann & Moser, 2013; Adams, 2016). Traditional sustainability strategies have been inadequate in addressing the underlying social causes of these crises, as societal inertia –rooted in entrenched norms, institutions, and power dynamics– continues to hinder progress. In *Environmental Sociology and Social Transformation: Key issues*, Magnus Boström and Rolf Lidskog examine how societal structures contribute to environmental degradation and emphasize the necessity for systemic changes in political, economic, and cultural frameworks. They provide both theoretical insights and practical examples to navigate the complexities of social-environmental dynamics and encourage meaningful progress toward sustainability.

The book is organized into several sections, each exploring different aspects of environmental sociology and social transformation. Boström and Lidskog begin by establishing the theoretical framework, highlighting how social structures and cultural norms influence environmental outcomes. They assert that environmental issues cannot be viewed in isolation from their social contexts. A recurring theme is societal inertia, which refers to the resistance to change caused by entrenched norms and interests that sustain unsustainable practices (p. 12). This concept serves as a crucial tool for understanding various environmental challenges. The authors examine the roles of various social actors –governments, corporations, civil society, and individuals– in shaping environmental policy and action. A significant section critiques market-based solutions, such as carbon trading, arguing that while they may offer short-term benefits, they ultimately fail to address

the root causes of environmental degradation, as they operate within unsustainable social and economic systems (p. 45). Instead, the authors advocate for more radical reforms that challenge existing power structures to foster equity and sustainability.

Social movements play a crucial role in driving environmental change. Boström and Lidskog provide examples of grassroots movements that have confronted environmental injustices and advocated for policy shifts. However, they emphasize that social movements alone cannot achieve the necessary changes; broader societal transformations — such as new governance structures, shifts in cultural values, and institutional reforms— are essential to overcome societal inertia (p. 78). Another important discussion revolves around “just transitions”, which Boström and Lidskog define as the need to ensure that environmental policies do not disproportionately impact vulnerable populations. Many policies, especially in the Global North, neglect to address equity and social justice, resulting in heightened social inequalities (p. 102). The authors argue for a holistic approach that integrates social justice within sustainability frameworks, ensuring that environmental reforms are equitable.

The book offers practical recommendations for social transformation, including policy reforms prioritizing long-term environmental goals over immediate economic gains. It advocates for environmental education to shift cultural values and for governance structures that promote cross-sectoral cooperation (p. 145). The authors emphasize the need for systemic change rather than incremental adjustments to effectively address today’s environmental crises. Another key theme is the connection between local and global environmental issues. While challenges like air pollution and deforestation may appear local, the authors argue their causes and consequences are global, requiring a multi-scalar approach to governance (p. 87). They stress the importance of recognizing the interconnectedness of ecosystems and societies and advocating for policies that integrate ecological, economic, and social dimensions.

The authors examine how technology influences environmental transformation, warning against an over-dependence on technological solutions. While acknowledging the advantages of technological innovations, they contend that these alone cannot address the social and economic systems contributing to environmental degradation (p. 160). They advocate for a more democratic approach to technology that includes public participation and considers the social implications of technological advancements. Throughout the book, the authors stress the importance of

interdisciplinary methods for tackling environmental issues, incorporating insights from sociology, economics, political science, and ecology (p. 195). They assert that marginalized voices — such as Indigenous communities, low-income groups, and women — must be integrated into environmental governance, as these groups often possess vital knowledge and perspectives that mainstream policy tends to overlook (p. 202).

Boström and Lidskog argue that environmental sustainability extends beyond ecological concerns to include significant social dimensions. They illustrate how environmental degradation is interconnected with social inequalities, economic systems, and political power structures. To achieve genuine sustainability, it is essential to address these underlying social factors; otherwise, efforts will remain superficial. True transformation demands a reevaluation of economic organization, the governance of natural resources, and society's relationship with the environment (p. 234).

The book examines the social aspects of sustainability, emphasizing the interconnectedness of social, political, and environmental systems. The authors critique traditional sustainability approaches and argue for transformative changes in governance, education, and economic systems to address the root causes of environmental degradation. Through theoretical analysis and practical examples, the book advocates for systemic reforms that prioritize social justice, power dynamics, and grassroots activism, presenting a vision for a more just and sustainable future. Boström and Lidskog's focus on inclusive governance, interdisciplinary approaches, and a rejection of neoliberal environmentalism offers insights into the complexities of environmental change.

The book's policy recommendations call for stronger regulatory frameworks that prioritize environmental protection over economic growth, increased investment in civil society organizations that advocate for environmental justice, and the adoption of more localized governance models. By integrating issues of inequality and the experiences of marginalized communities into the sustainability discourse, the authors underscore the transformative potential of collective action and policy interventions. Overall, *Environmental Sociology and Social Transformation* is a valuable resource for scholars, activists, and policymakers who aim to navigate the social complexities of environmental issues and work towards a sustainable and equitable world.

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