



## Current insights into social ecology: special issue of the journal 'Sustainability' published

**In the last decades social ecology has made important contributions to sustainability research. As the science of societal relationship to nature it evolved in the late 1980s. Today, the approach that understands complex environmental problems to be rooted in the critical relationship between society and nature is regarded to be fundamental for research dealing with sustainable development. Now, with a special issue of the renowned international journal 'Sustainability' a comprehensive insight is given to the state of the art of social-ecological research.**

The special issue 'Social Ecology. State of the Art and Future Prospects' was published by the Vienna Institute for Social Ecology (SEC) of the faculty for interdisciplinary research and education at the Alpen-Adria-University Klagenfurt and ISOE – Institute for Social-Ecological Research, Frankfurt am Main. Both institutes have significantly coined social ecology in the German speaking countries during the last decades. The focal point of both institutes' scientific work is the question of how the complex relations between society and nature can be theoretically captured, empirically investigated and sustainably shaped.

The interdisciplinary journal 'Sustainability' is giving a comprehensive outline of the current state of social-ecological research. Guest editors Johanna Kramm and Martin Zimmermann from ISOE as well as Melanie Pichler and Anke Schaffartzik from SEC have compiled eleven contributions from 29 scientists from Vienna and Frankfurt. Among them are articles on the conceptional and theoretical foundations of social ecology as well as contributions on specific empirical case studies.

The peer reviewed essays are inter alia dealing with the role of social ecology as a critical, transdisciplinary science, with the current challenges for social-ecological transformations and with ecosystem services as one of the key concepts of sustainability research. Risks with regard to handling natural resources like water are also addressed.

### **Social ecology as a key for sustainability research**

Social ecology evolved in the 1980s from the critical perspective on an environmental research that was technically-oriented and dominated by the natural sciences. Since the Chernobyl nuclear accident at the latest, this view proved to be too limited to capture complex environmental problems. "Social ecology and its social science informed approach has from the start never been an alternative to the classic conception of science but an expansion helping to overcome the narrow view of the natural and engineering sciences", says Thomas Jahn, member of ISOE's executive board and its spokesperson. Today, social-ecological explanatory models for the relational patterns of society and nature are seen as scientifically established and fundamental for understanding and shaping transformation processes.

"The current social-ecological crises as for instance the effects of climate change or the loss of biodiversity show how urgently social ecology is needed", says Thomas Jahn. "In order to create ways towards sustainable development we need to understand the role of the human factor with respect to the origins of these crises." Social ecology is a key for sustainability research to understand, assess and shape nature-society relations in crisis. "That is why we are happy to offer ISOE's long-standing research approaches and findings to a broader scientific public with this special issue on social ecology together with our colleagues from Vienna.

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**ISOE – Institute for Social-Ecological Research, Frankfurt am Main**

ISOE is one of the leading independent institutes for sustainability research. For over 25 years now, the Institute has been developing fundamental scientific principles and future orientated concepts for governments/policy makers, the civil society and business leaders – on a regional, national and international scale. The research topics include water, energy, climate protection, mobility, urban spaces, biodiversity, and social-ecological systems.