Tranformative adaptation in a changing world

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Abstract

Adaptation to climate change is largely envisioned as increments of adjustments that society has made or might make to reduce its vulnerability to existing climate change and variability intended to avoid disruptions of systems at their current locations (Kates, Travis et al. 2012). However, vulnerabilities and risks may require transformational adaptation rather than adjustments. Existing structures, institutions, attitudes and behaviors need to be critically evaluated in light of the risks that climate change poses or should pose in the future. There has been a growing interest in the scholarly community for integrating political and ecological processes in the theorization of transformative adaptation in socio-ecological systems. However, recent selected review on adaptation to climate change has demonstrated that only 3% of journal articles viewed adaptation as a process of transformation change (Bassett and Fogelman 2013). Most of the literature (70%) takes an “adjustment adaptation” approach, which views climate impacts as the main source of vulnerability. In contrast to this perspective in which individual decision makers adapt to natural hazards through a “satisficing” process, transformative adaptation relates to a social process in which political-economic dynamics and social relations determine individuals ”adaptive capability” (Watts 1983). It emphasizes the importance of understanding the causal structures of vulnerability in different political-economic and environmental contexts as the basis of adaptation. Very few papers viewed adaptation as a transformational process that addresses the structural causes of vulnerability in different political-economic and environmental contexts, and the social processes through which evolving political-economic dynamics and social relations can increase individual adaptive capabilities.

The proposed session will advance understanding of transformation adaptation by highlighting the structural causes of vulnerability and transformational solutions. Our goal is to bring together various experts from the sustainability and climate change science including resilience and vulnerability thinkers and practitioners. The objective is to analyse different perspectives and experiences on transformational adaptation among coupled environmental and human systems. We aim to generate common and cutting edges reflexions on the politics, the praxis and the ethics of transformational adaptation. We also encourage presenters to analyse linkages, synergies and trade-offs between different research practices/communities toward a transformational adaptation of coupled environmental and human systems.

Case studies of adaptation processes will focus on rural livelihoods that rely on forests and

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trees. They will examine the different types of adaptation to climate change that are addressed by adaptation plans and initiatives. The objective is to analyse different experiences of transformational adaptation of social-ecological systems under different lenses of analysis. We aim also to generate common and cutting edges reflexions on the politics, the praxis and the ethics of transformational adaptation. Does science itself requires a transformational changes and a radical paradigm shifting?

**Keywords:** Adaptation to climate change — Adaptive capacity — Complex adaptive systems — Political Ecology — Transformation