

Sociology and climate change after Kyoto: what roles for sociology?

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This paper focuses on the comparatively neglected role of the social sciences (including economics) in projections about climate change. Though these projections inevitably include estimates of changes in the atmosphere and the oceans, they also include such topics as how societies will respond to changing climates and related environmental phenomena. Using an approach from science and technology studies (STS), this paper will examine the part played by the social sciences in making knowledge about the future of humankind in relation to the changing ecosphere.

The paper concentrates on two case studies. One deals with how value was attached to economic activities in different countries in the course of attempts to calculate the most 'rational' global response to the myriad threats of changing climates. The other deals with the way that socio-economic assumptions underlie and (sometimes) figure in calculations about the putative costs of the Kyoto Protocol and similar abatement strategies.

The paper concludes with general observations on STS's role in critical reflection on the role played by the social sciences in environmental modelling and forecasting.