

SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION

IN TIMES REGRESSION

International Symposium

University of Kassel, 4-5 December 2025

In the context of multiple ecological, political-economic, and social crises, the question of socio-ecological transformation has taken on growing importance in both activist and scholarly debates in recent decades. However, recent global trends towards authoritarianism, nationalism, ultra-neoliberalism, and a renaissance of fossilism pose serious challenges to such transformation in many parts of the world, particularly when it aims to be emancipatory, that is, radically democratic and inclusive.

The international symposium addresses these challenges from a multi-scalar and transnational perspective, taking into account multiple interrelated political-economic and socio-ecological reconfigurations. These include the deepening of ecological crises and the crisis of social reproduction; the emergence of a new geopolitical order shaped by intensifying rivalry between the US and China, the resurgence of the BRICS, and expanding global competition over strategic resources and markets in the name of national competitiveness; and a global tendency toward democratic regression and cultural backlash, visible in rising nationalism, anti-feminism, the proliferation of authoritarian orders, and the rise of the far right.

Against this background, the symposium asks how emancipatory socio-ecological transformations can be realized despite prevailing regressive dynamics. To address this question, the symposium focuses on five key themes:

1. dynamics of regression: a time-diagnostic classification;
2. shifting global order: geopolitics of decarbonisation;
3. contested futures: social movements and the reproduction of life;
4. labor and labor struggles
5. alliances and linkages: resisting regression across sectors and regions.

The aim of the symposium is to bring together scholars from different fields of research and world regions to better understand the challenges facing emancipatory socio-ecological transformation today. Guiding questions of the symposium include:

- What political-economic, geopolitical, and political-cultural dynamics and changes are currently unfolding? How can these changes be described and analyzed from a transnational perspective? What implications do they have for emancipatory socio-ecological transformations?
- Who are the actors striving for socio-ecological transformation in times of regression? What strategies do they use? How are their struggles linked transnationally?
- What alliances and linkages of struggles between sectors and world regions can be observed shaping pathways toward emancipatory socio-ecological transformations in times of regression? How can such alliances be built and strengthened?

Thursday, 4 Dec 2025

- 13.30 Registration & Coffee
- 14.30 Welcome & Introduction
- 14.45 **PANEL:**
SHIFTING GLOBAL ORDER:
geopolitics of decarbonisation
- Chair: **Kristina Dietz** and **Carla Noever Castelos** (University of Kassel)
- Speakers:
Miriam Lang (Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar)
Etienne Schneider / Alina Brad (University of Vienna)
Jenny Simon (University of Flensburg)
Markus Wissen (Berlin School of Economics and Law)
- 16:30 Coffee & tea
- 18.00 **KEYNOTE LECTURE:**
EMANCIPATION IN TIMES OF REGRESSION –
a time-diagnostic classification
- Speakers:
Eva von Redecker (Philosopher and Non-fiction writer) and **Micaela Cuesta** (Universidad Nacional de San Martín) *in dialogue*
- 20:00 Reception

Friday, 5 Dec 2025

- 09.00 Welcome back & coffee
- 09.30 **PANEL:**
CONTESTED FUTURES:
social movements and the reproduction of life
- Chair: **Sarah Uhlmann** and **Carla Noever Castelos** (University of Kassel)
- Speakers:
Cristina Vega Solís (Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences, FLACSO Ecuador)
Mariana Walter (Institut Barcelona d'Estudis Internacionals)
Rita Calvário (DINÂMIA'CET-Iscte, Lisbon)
- 11.15 Coffee & tea
- 11.45 **PANEL:**
THE DUAL ROLE OF LABOR:
driver of crisis or transformation?
- Chair: **Janina Puder** and **Virginia Kimey Pflücke** (Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus–Senftenberg)

Speakers:

Nora Räthzel (Umeå Universitet)

Liam Campling (Queen Mary University of London)

Simon Schaupp (Technische Universität Berlin)

13.30 Lunch

14.30 **CONCLUDING PANEL:**
RESISTING REGRESSION:
linking struggles

Chair: N.N.

Speakers:

Ulrich Brand (University of Vienna)

Simon Schaupp (Technische Universität Berlin)

Eva von Redecker (Philosopher and Non-fiction writer)

Cristina Vega Solís (Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences, FLACSO Ecuador)

16.30 Coffee, tea & farewell