

Editorial

Sustainability Transformations: Emerging Pathways Toward Safe and Just Futures for People and the Planet

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We are pleased to introduce the third special issue in Challenges in Sustainability entitled Sustainability transformations: Emerging pathways toward safe and just futures for people and the planet.

This special issue emerged in partnership with the Canadian Society for Ecological Economics (CANSEE) in the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 crisis has led to many calls for recovery, to rebuild, and to build back better to address the climate crisis. But the pandemic has exposed vulnerabilities and tensions inherent in established political and economic systems. Existing vulnerabilities and inequalities have exacerbated challenges for health and wellbeing, threatened community livelihoods, and impeded efforts to achieve ecological stability and integrity. Moreover, tensions have revealed how deeply interconnected social, economic, and environmental dimensions of wellbeing are. Simply rebuilding to pursue the previous path is neither tenable nor desirable. Instead, the current context provides an opportunity to pivot towards safe and just futures for people and the planet. This urgent task demands courage, creativity, and experimentation. What groups, initiatives, and visions have been seeded or are emerging from the cracks created by the pandemic? What features of our systems must be reimagined and what relationships must be renegotiated? And what solutions are capable of catalyzing action that supports this reorientation?

CANSEE supports emerging and established sustainability scholars and ecological economists in understanding

and analyzing sustainability challenges from a perspective that is deeply critical of the status quo. Ecological economists have long emphasized the limits of attempting to address the climate crisis within an outdated growth-oriented economic framework that prioritizes increasing economic activity at the expense of attending to quality and ecological integrity. Thus, ecological economists have important contributions to make in understanding and supporting sustainability transformations towards just, regenerative, and ecological economies.

This special issue engages with sustainability challenges from an ecological economics perspective in the context of recent vulnerabilities, inequalities, injustices, and systemic tensions. Papers in this special issue use the lens, critiques, and tools of ecological economics to engage with problems at the intersection of ecological and social challenges. These contributions focus on multiple levels from the community to international scales to inform effective, inclusive, and transformative solutions. They are solution-oriented in that they apply ecological economics thinking to explore concrete problems that impact human and ecological wellbeing.

An important contribution of this special issue is real-world application through knowledge transfer. Recognizing that solutions are inherently complex and systemic, they implicate diverse actors from governments, NGOs, Indigenous groups, activists, businesses and civil society. Thus, we encouraged submissions that considered transformative

solutions to address relationships between different groups, societies, and species in different regions and on different timescales. To increase the impact of their research, contributors developed publically accessible knowledge transfer pieces such as a policy brief, op-ed or related output where appropriate. In addition to knowledge dissemination, authors of these pieces often proposed recommendations for

concrete steps needed to realize the solutions identified. Alongside individual papers, links to and PDFs of these accompanying knowledge transfer pieces are also provided.

We would like to thank CANSEE for their generous support in encouraging scholarship and publishing this special issue.