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# Introduction to the Symposium on Catton and Dunlap's Foundational Work Establishing an Ecological Paradigm

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As is the case with many scholarly fields, it is difficult to give an exact date to the beginning of environmental sociology. Although some classical figures in the discipline of sociology were not indifferent to ecological influences on societies (Foster, 2000; Rosa & Richter, 2008), throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as the authors in this symposium correctly note, sociology largely ignored the biophysical environment. Following the rise of public interest in environmental issues in the 1960s and 1970s, the subdiscipline of environmental sociology was formally founded in the United States in 1976 with the formation of the Environmental Sociology section (subsequently renamed the section on Environment & Technology) of the American Sociological Association (ASA). (The 25th anniversary of this section was celebrated in this journal not too long ago [Lutzenhiser, 2002].)

While the year 1976 marks the formal origin of the section, it can be argued that the intellectual foundation of the field was not properly established until 1978, when William Catton and Riley Dunlap published their article "Environmental Sociology: A New Paradigm" in *The American Sociologist* (Catton & Dunlap, 1978). In this path-breaking article, Catton and Dunlap argued that sociology as a discipline had failed to recognize the importance of the natural environment and that in order to address growing environmental problems and to improve our understanding of contemporary societies, it was necessary to incorporate an understanding of the ecological context of modern industrial societies into sociology. This symposium was organized to celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this foundational article and two subsequent articles by Catton and Dunlap, one in the *Annual Review of Sociology* (Dunlap & Catton, 1979) and the other in the *American Behavioral Scientist* (Catton & Dunlap, 1980), which together provided an explicit intellectual grounding for environmental sociology—defined as the study of societal-environmental interactions.

The effect of Catton and Dunlap's work has been profound, since it opened up a large swath of new terrain to sociological inquiry. It made possible the growing body of research in sociology that examines both human effects on the environment and the effects of the environment on society. Recently—thanks in no small part to the work done in the early years of environmental sociology by Catton and Dunlap, as well as other pioneering environmental sociologists—environmental research has begun to appear in top sociology journals, something that was unthinkable three decades ago, as the contributors to the symposium make clear. Catton and Dunlap's work has even helped spur the emergence of

critical materialism/realism in some approaches to the sociology of science (long a bastion of strong social constructionism), such as Foster and Clark's (2008) development of "the sociology of ecology." The dramatic diversity of scholarship that followed from Catton and Dunlap's foundational work, whether it is always explicitly acknowledged or not, is a true testament to the importance of the ecological paradigm they developed.

Fred Buttel (1987, p. 467) identified the tradition that Catton and Dunlap founded as the "new human ecology" and suggested that this tradition was at the core of environmental sociology. Ted Benton (2001, p. 6) has noted that this ecological tradition was centered at Washington State University (WSU), where Catton and Dunlap each spent a large part of their careers along with other leading environmental sociologists, including Eugene Rosa, Loren Lutzenhiser, Lee Freese, and William Freudenburg (who presents his reflections on Catton and Dunlap's work in this symposium). This WSU tradition continues to this day, not only at WSU but also at the many places where people who studied and conducted research at WSU over the years have ended up and where others have been inspired by the work of the aforementioned scholars.

On a personal note, I began my own engagement with environmental sociology when I started the doctoral program at WSU in 1998. My first semester there, I took Dunlap's graduate course on environmental sociology, which provided me with a firm grounding in the field and has influenced my thinking and research ever since. By opening space for ecological analyses in sociology, Catton and Dunlap helped make it possible for Eugene Rosa, Thomas Dietz, and me to situate our examination of human drivers of environmental impacts in a sociological context and publish it in *American Sociological Review*—the core journal of the ASA (York, Rosa, & Dietz, 2003). Our work in structural human ecology using the STIRPAT model, which was developed by Dietz and Rosa (1994, 1997), is clearly in the WSU tradition of an ecologically grounded environmental sociology initiated by Catton and Dunlap.

This symposium originated earlier this year when my co-editor John Jermier and I (in collaboration with Timothy Luke) decided to ask Freudenburg to write an article for the *Citation Classics and Foundational Works* feature of the journal highlighting the wide-ranging impact of Catton and Dunlap's work. We asked Freudenburg to contribute due to his integral role in environmental sociology from its early years.

Freudenburg's thoughtful article inspired Jermier to propose that we ask Catton and Dunlap to write up some of their own reflections on their early work, which they each kindly agreed to do. Jermier makes an important contribution to this symposium with his discussion of paradigms in sociology and the spread of the New Ecological Paradigm to organizational studies (and other fields). He also discusses the role of the New Ecological Paradigm in the founding of *Organization & Environment*. Together these contributions present the excitement and intellectual energy that characterized the early years of new paradigm thinking in sociology, organizational studies, and other areas. These essays provide fascinating reflections on the founding of a field of scholarship and the continuing importance of the ecological tradition Catton and Dunlap helped establish.

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