



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
DI BERGAMO

Challenges in a world in transition- M2

Prof. Vera Lomazzi

*Introduction – Sociological perspective
to SDGs*

The goal of this module

Adopting *a sociological perspective* to discuss the social dimensions of sustainability issues

The module will take into account questions related to unequal power relations, uneven development, questions of justice, gender, generations, and collective versus individual responsibility

What are we going to do in this module?

1. Sustainable Development Goals: a critical approach

2. Global social inequalities:

- Social differences, unequal access to opportunities and the intersection of inequalities
- Demographic challenges and intergenerational conflicts
- Gender inequalities and global challenges
- Poverty and economic growth: social stratification and mobility dynamics
- Migration flows (with a focus on environmental migration)
- Human values in times of crisis: global solidarity and social cohesion; individualistic values and collectivistic values



Material

Material from the classes (**slides**)

Academic **articles**

- Kabeer, N. (2015). Gender, poverty, and inequality: A brief history of feminist contributions in the field of international development. *Gender & Development*, 23(2), 189–205.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2015.1062300> (18 pages)
- Nijenhuis, G., & Leung, M. (2017). Rethinking Migration in the 2030 Agenda: Towards a De-Territorialized Conceptualization of Development. *Forum for Development Studies*, 44(1), 51–68.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08039410.2016.1276958> (19 pages)
- Freistein, K., & Mahlert, B. (2016). The potential for tackling inequality in the Sustainable Development Goals. *Third World Quarterly*, 37(12), 2139–2155. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2016.1166945> (18 pages)
- Horlings, L. (2015). The inner dimension of sustainability: Personal and cultural values. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 14, 163–169. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2015.06.006> (7 pages)

Video

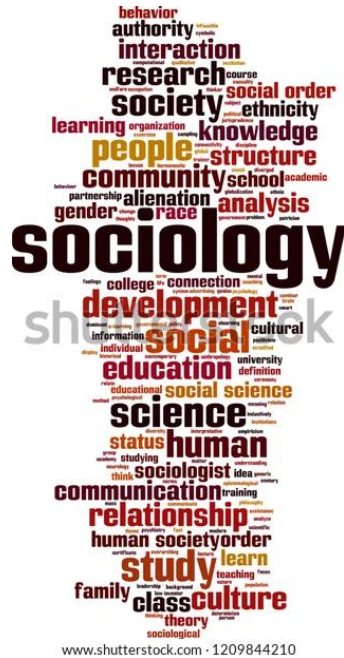
«Mapping Planetary AI» <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0PqrZ2lqT70>



**What does it means «using a
sociological perspective»?**



It's the systematic study of human behaviour, social interaction, social institutions, and society



Sociologists study patterns of behavior in order to draw general conclusions about a social issue that transcend the effect of the problem or issue on any particular individual.

This is not to say that sociologists are unconcerned about individuals and their lives, but sociology's emphasis is on the way individuals relate to others, people's positions in society, and the interdependence between society and individuals.



The sociological perspective

- interest in social problem (not in personal troubles)
- interest in societal relevance



Thinking like a sociologist

- How would you explain that some people are obese, and others are not? What would be the reason you think?



Individual perspective

- Focuses on individual causes
- E.g., John's eating pattern, self-control, genetics

Sociological perspective

- Focuses on social causes
- Sociological imagination (Mills)
- “John” and “Kaito” as *typical* behavior in a certain context (e.g., US and Japan)

Percentage of population aged 18+ obese and overweight (2014)

(WHO, 2016b)

	Overweight	Obesity
North America		
United States	66.9	34.9
Canada	63.2	28.3
Mexico	63.9	27.8
South America		
Argentina	61.8	27.3
Brazil	55.3	21.1
Asia		
China	30.8	5.5
India	18.6	3.5
Indonesia	26.5	6.1
Japan	26.4	3.9
Pakistan	27.0	7.8
Africa		
Nigeria	27.6	8.1
Egypt	62.2	30.6
South Africa	52.5	27.2
Europe		
France	58.6	20.8
Germany	56.0	21.5
UK	62.7	26.6
Italy	57.6	19.3
Russia	56.3	22.5
Oceania		
Australia	63.6	27.9



Social problems



Personal trouble and public issue

- **Mills (1959):** personal troubles and public issues
 - **Personal trouble:** individual problem (e.g., John is obese)
 - **Public issue:** social problem (e.g., many people are obese, and this is seen as undesirable)
- A social problem
 - goes beyond the individual (affect more people)
 - many people are concerned with it (it conflict with certain values)

Under-five mortality rate per 1,000 live births (2015)

Mortality Rate	
North America	
United States	6.8
Canada	5.3
Mexico	14.3
South America	
Argentina	11.4
Brazil	15.7
Asia	
China	10.4
India	44.1
Indonesia	27.2
Japan	3.0
Pakistan	79.5
Africa	
Nigeria	107.5
Egypt	23.7
South Africa	40.3
Europe	
France	4.2
Germany	3.9
UK	4.5
Italy	3.5
Russia	8.6
Oceania	
Australia	3.8

(UNICEF, 2016)



Examples of social problems

- Crime and unsafety in neighborhoods
- Bullying at school
- Violence and abuse in families
- Inter-ethnic tensions
- Terrorism
- War and collective violence
- Refugee crisis
- Societal polarization
- Discrimination (by gender, age, ethnic and economic status..)
- Excessive income inequality
- Erosion of social connections
- High unemployment rate
- Global warming and pollution
- Migration

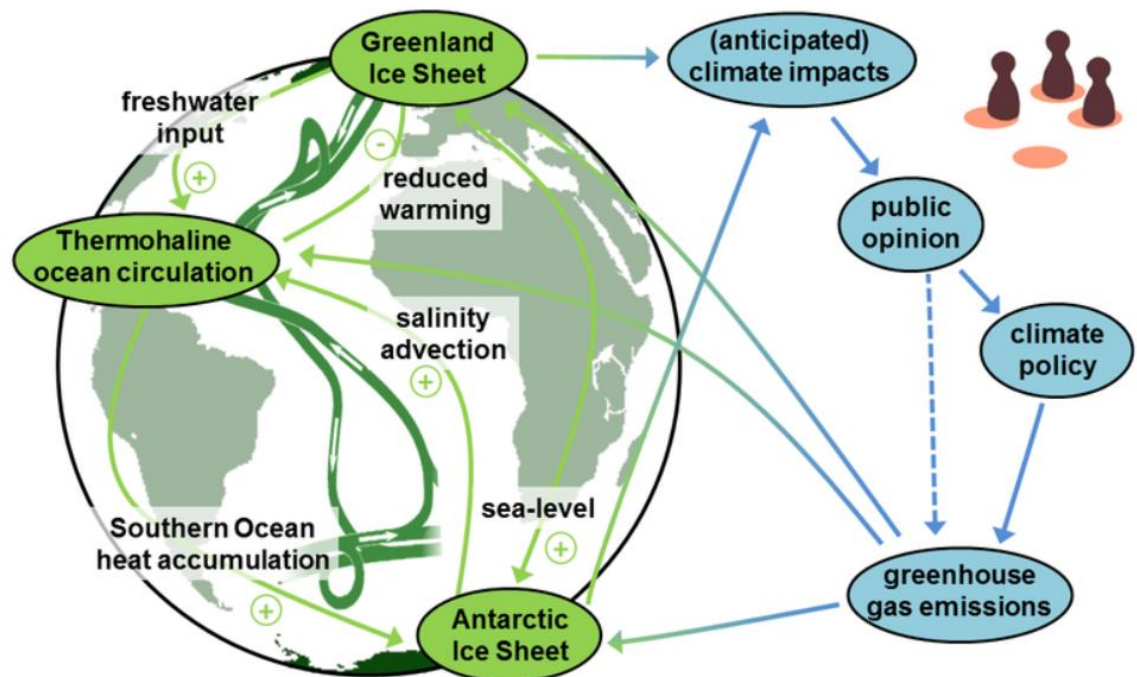
Interdisciplinarity

- The complexity of contemporary issues requires interdisciplinarity
- For example, think of global warming and the climate crises

DominoES project

Domino Effects in the Earth System: Can Antarctica tip climate policy?

(Interacting Tipping Elements)



SDGs Goals



SDGs

- 2015: UN Member States adopts [the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)
- It “provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future.
- At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries – developed and developing – in a *global partnership*.
- They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go *hand-in-hand* with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.”*
- Global strategy for tackling inequalities combining with a new idea of **development**

Questioning the concept of «development»

What does «development» mean?



Concepts of 'development'

- Field “Developmental studies”
- the term ‘development’ referred to evolutionary processes of social change (e.g. Rostow 1960)
- Usually, the change was associated with an improvement in living standards
- In the beginning of the discipline, the goal was economic growth and industrialisation, later it extended to basic needs, poverty reduction or sustainability.
- ‘Development’ was measured primarily through the gross national product (GNP), like in the World Bank’s World Development Reports, later indicators like formal education and life expectancy became relevant as well, like in the UNDP’s Human Development Index.



Western colonialism



For a long time, definitions were influential or even predominant which conceived of the idea of 'development' as '*following in the footsteps of the West*' (Bernstein cited by Thomas/Potter 1992: 119).

Menzel understood 'development' explicitly as processes of 'economic growth, industrialisation, social differentiation and mobilisation, mental change, democratisation and redistribution' which took place in Western Europe, North America and later East Asia, but not (or at least not fully) in the rest of the world and for him, the task of development theory is to explain this *lagging behind*

Problems

- Eurocentrism (*ethnocentrism*)
- All-too-simple pattern of perception and explanation for various social phenomena)
- The terminology implies that problems (related to power, privilege and exclusion) can be solved by 'development' institutions and projects.
- Good ground for donor institutions, planning ministries, concerned social groups and NGOs. Who could be against 'development'? But difficult to find support for political initiatives which point to conflicts on the national or international level and side with marginalised, exploited or oppressed groups
- Subalternity and distinction between «developed», «less developed» or «developing» countries



How to include inequality into the development debate?

1) Radical Break

Substitute «development» entirely with «inequality» issues (improbable, too radical)

2) Smooth incorporation

Modification of development practices by including attention to inequalities, but the traditional institutional approach is kept

3) Fundamental reforms

Instead of breaking or supplementing the concept of development with the idea of inequality, reforming in a way of translating development commitments from an inequality perspective (see Freistein & Mahlert 2015)



A paradigm change on inequality and development

- Inequality has been systematically integrated into the SDGs
- 17 goals, **11 of them address forms of inequality** in terms of reducing inequality/ensuring equity and access to opportunity or inclusion



Reduce inequality/ Ensure equity

- Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere
- Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
- Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
- Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
- Goal 6. Ensure *availability* and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
- Goal 7. Ensure *access* to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
- **Goal 10.** Reduce inequality within and among countries



Promote inclusion

- Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
- Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
- Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
- Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
- Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development



Universal development goals

- The SDGs are formulated as universal development goals, **pertaining to all countries (and individuals) alike.**
- The semantics of 'inclusive', 'equitable', 'equal', 'by/for all', and 'in all its forms' indicate a turn towards equality concerns.
- Thus all goals pertaining to individual outcomes (education, poverty eradication, access to food, health, sanitation, energy, growth, urban infrastructure) are formulated so as to be inclusive or equitable.
- Relevant step for overcoming the historical Colonial tendency of assigning "inferior world-societal status" to global South countries (that also obscured long-lasting development problems in the rich global North)

