

## **Law in the Anthropocene: A Call for a New Socio-Legal WG**

Dear RCSL Community,

We are writing to propose the creation of a new Working Group within our Research Committee on Sociology of Law focused on the intersections of law, society, and environment. This initiative emerges from growing recognition that the profound ecological transformations of our time demand innovative socio-legal responses and renewed scholarly attention.

The theme of the 5th ISA Forum of Sociology—Knowing Justice in the Anthropocene—held in Rabat in 2025, underscored the urgency of addressing these planetary challenges through interdisciplinary dialogue. Building on these conversations, a dedicated RCSL Working Group could provide a vital space for examining how legal institutions, practices, and discourses are adapting—or failing to adapt—to ecological realities, and how sociological perspectives can illuminate these transformations (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2011).

The Anthropocene—marked by humanity's irreversible impact on Earth's geological and ecological systems—poses fundamental challenges to existing legal frameworks and calls for reimagining the relationship between law, society, and nature (Kotzé & Kim, 2019; Vermeyleen, 2017). Recent scholarship has highlighted how climate crises are catalyzing significant legal transformations, from the emergence of climate litigation and rights of nature jurisprudence to questions of intergenerational justice and environmental constitutionalism (Peel & Osofsky, 2015; Burdon, 2015; Morrow, 2021). The RCSL session 'Constitutionalism, Politics and Environmental Justice in the Anthropocene' exemplified the diversity of socio-legal approaches to these challenges and revealed the deep entanglement between law, politics, and ecological justice (RCSL Meeting, Rabat 2025).

Traditional legal paradigms, rooted in anthropocentric assumptions and nation-state sovereignty, also struggle to address the temporal, spatial, and scalar complexity of environmental crises. The Anthropocene demands that we rethink foundational legal concepts such as property, personhood, responsibility, and jurisdiction (Gear, 2015). As Chakrabarty (2009) argues, climate change disrupts conventional historical and political categories, requiring new forms of collective imagination and governance. From a socio-legal perspective, this raises critical questions: How do communities mobilize law to resist environmental degradation? How do power asymmetries shape access to environmental justice? What role do non-state actors and indigenous legal orders play in environmental governance? (Rodríguez-Garavito & Rodríguez-Franco, 2015; Whyte, 2018).

The sociology of law is uniquely positioned to analyze these transformations empirically and critically. While environmental law scholarship has made significant strides, socio-legal inquiry can complement this work by examining the social production of legal norms, the lived experiences of environmental conflicts, and the cultural meanings attached to ecological crises (Blichner & Molander, 2008). Recent developments—such as the global wave of climate litigation involving youth plaintiffs, the recognition of rivers and ecosystems as legal persons in multiple jurisdictions, and the proliferation of corporate accountability mechanisms—illustrate how legal change is deeply embedded in social movements, cultural shifts, and political contestation (Setzer & Higham, 2022; O'Donnell & Talbot-Jones, 2018).

Moreover, the Anthropocene invites us to reconsider the relationship between human and non-human actors within legal systems. Scholars working at the intersection of law, science and technology studies, and environmental humanities have demonstrated how legal categories both

shape and are shaped by scientific knowledge, technological developments, and ecological processes (Jasanoff, 2010; Latour, 2017). The RCSL session 'Knowing Digital Justice in the Anthropocene' expanded this discussion to the digital and technological domains, probing how digital infrastructures mediate socio-environmental governance and justice (RCSL Meeting, Rabat 2025). within legal systems. A socio-legal Working Group could also explore how legal institutions mediate between competing forms of environmental knowledge—from indigenous cosmologies to climate science—and how law itself becomes a site of ontological negotiation in the face of ecological crisis (de la Cadena, 2010; Cloatre & Cowan, 2019).

Finally, the global dimensions of environmental crises necessitate comparative and transnational approaches. Climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution transcend national boundaries, yet legal responses remain fragmented across jurisdictions with vastly different capacities and priorities (Bodansky et al., 2017). Within the framework of ISA, an RCSL Working Group could facilitate dialogue among scholars examining environmental law and governance across diverse geographical, political, and cultural contexts, from the Global South's experiences with extractivism and environmental displacement to the Arctic's confrontation with rapid ecological transformation (Martinez-Alier, 2021; Bavikatte & Bennett, 2015). Such comparative work is essential for understanding how legal pluralism, transnational activism, and global governance mechanisms interact in shaping environmental futures.

This proposal is deliberately open-ended at this stage. Many aspects remain to be defined collaboratively, including the precise focus, the definitive name of the WG, organizational structure, and research priorities. We envision organizing virtual meetings around Easter 2026 to bring together interested colleagues and collectively develop the formal application dossier.

If you are interested in participating in this initiative, whether as a core member or contributor, please contact me before 30<sup>th</sup> January 2026 at: [cassiano.ribas@outlook.com](mailto:cassiano.ribas@outlook.com). We welcome scholars at all career stages working on environmental law, climate justice, ecological governance, legal pluralism, or related socio-legal topics.

Let us work together to build a Working Group that reflects the intellectual diversity and critical engagement our times demand.

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