

I have tried to indicate some lines of the argument necessary for a sociological account of the assessment of global environmental change. I began by outlining some of the social driving forces embedded in the development of modernity that are important in assessing the social and political roots of GEC. Much more could be said about each of those factors, but the point I wish to make is that any sociological account of GEC is bound to fall short of the mark unless we consider these historical developments as precursors of GEC. I have also tried to stress the importance of the process of globalization as one which has strengthened the dynamics of modernization to the point where the unintended and negative consequences of modernity have become visible worldwide as global environmental problems. Next, I discussed the history and results of scientific climate change research as an example of the reflexively applied knowledge of science. Then I sought to indicate some politics involved in climate change to provide an example of the social representation and clinic political action involved in the social procedures of GEC. What I hopefully succeeded in making explicit are the cumulative and human-driven cause-effect chain mechanisms embedded in the proliferation of global environmental change.

I also wanted to point out how these different actors, institutions and processes are connected to the problem of GEC in such a paradoxical way that what is identified as a cause in the first place may serve as a remedy in the next. Taking the problem of climate change as an example of this self-refutational aspect of risk society, I am suggesting that each identified element of modernization forces has difficulties facing the challenge presented by problems of such magnitude as global climate change, especially in terms of their mitigation. Science has great difficulties in trying to provide clear answers to the question 'what is happening to our climate system?', the global capitalist market system is clearly having trouble redirecting its economy away from fossil fuel energy, nation-states are having great trouble trying to reduce their national emissions and achieve a consensus on reducing worldwide emissions.