

Presentation

The stability of the Earth System is crucial to the preservation of life as we know it on this planet. Climate change, loss of biodiversity, human use of sweet water, among other processes, must not exceed certain limits, if we wish to avoid environmental imbalances that could compromise the quality of human life and of other species.

This warning is increasingly urgent, as the growing consumption of energy and the accelerating rate of exploitation of the environment are altering the bio-geochemical system that supports life on Earth. The impact is such that the changes are beginning to be defined on a geological scale, and are described as a world ecological crisis attributable to a crisis of the Western civilization model.

In this issue, **INTERdisciplina** offers insights on this complex inter-relationship between the Earth System in its present geological era, known as the Holocene—in its bio-geochemical dimension—and the World System generated by modern society, constituted as a worldwide capitalist economy—in its historical and social dimension—that enable us to attempt an explanation of this global crisis and explore viable and desirable ways to face it.

The concept of sustainability comprises a plural agenda for the construction of alternatives to the contradiction that exists between the intensive use of resources imposed by the growing pattern of production and consumption determined by the dominant economic model, and the underlying risk that the tolerance margins for the balance of the Earth System might be overrun, affecting those conditions that enable the reproduction of life.

Growing evidence that economic growth with asymmetric distribution and high social and environmental costs does not improve the quality of life of the population as a whole, has sparked the emergence of diverse discourses on sustainability, that express varied strategies to prevent the collapse of human societies.

The ideological projections of these discourses either preclude or emphasize the human dimension of the ecological crisis. In the case of sustainable development, for example, it rejects the contradiction in the long term between economic growth and environmental protection, with the argument that technological progress would make them complementary. However, on the other hand, transition discourses, such as the degrowth options and the post-development proposals, build upon the idea that contemporary environmental and social crises are intrinsically intertwined with the dominant life model, and consequently

they propose a transition towards new forms of living that subordinate economic considerations to human dignity and social justice.

This dossier offers a critical appraisal of the broader picture of sustainability, from which emerge hybrid domains and fields of learning with novel approaches, building on complex thought. ■