

Political Imagination and Social Change

Sociological Research Online Special Issue Call for Papers

British Sociological Association journal Sociological Research Online (SRO) and guest editors invite abstract submissions for a special of the journal.



Deadline for submission of abstracts: 12 June 2023

This special issue addresses political imagination as a key driver of transformative politics and social change. It approaches political imagination as a generative force that is inherently intersubjective, affective, material, and social. Political imagination comprises imaginaries, utopian visions, and repertoires of other possible worlds. Its significance lies in its capacity to envisage social reality in a radically different manner, animate political desire, activate political will, articulate political critique, and organise collective action for social change. Political imagination enables social dreaming and destabilises conventional ways of thinking that tend to restrict us to a narrow repertoire of political possibilities.

The theme of this special issue is particularly timely and relevant to sociology. Utopian thought as a mode of political imagination fell into disrepute following the end of the Cold War, and barring few exceptions (e.g. Levitas 2013; Sargisson 2002), it also relinquished its position in sociology as an important conceptual resource (Hviid Jacobsen 2004). However, our current conjuncture, which is riddled with multiple and far-reaching crises, has contributed to a renewed interest in utopian thought and political imagination (see e.g. Eskelinen 2020; Allen 2015; Savransky 2022). These crises underline the acute need to envisage alternative socially, politically, and ecologically more sustainable social formations and futures. Yet, it also seems to be increasingly difficult to imagine social formations beyond the capitalist factory settings of economic growth, waged work, limitless consumption, and persistent gendered, classed, and racialised forms of oppression and exploitation. Critics have suggested that our current conjuncture is best described as post-political and anti-utopian: our capacities for political imagination have dissipated, which impoverishes our sense of what is possible.

This special issue departs from this pessimistic diagnosis and suggests that political imagination has not necessarily dissipated, but its forms, practices, and spaces have been transformed. Alternative political futures are constantly imagined, performed, and practiced in a host of everyday spaces that people inhabit, but we need to refine and recalibrate our analytical tools and methodologies to capture and understand them. Sociological research can contribute to reinvigorating our collective political imagination and understanding the shifting dynamics of social change. By addressing political imagination as a driver of social change, this special issue contributes to what Erik Olin Wright (2010) has called “a sociology of the possible”, that is, sociology that explores and develops strategies that enable us to make empirically and theoretically sound arguments about emancipatory possibilities.

This special issue will engage with the conceptual, methodological and empirical debates of political imagination and utopian thought. It welcomes theoretical, empirical, and methodological papers that may deal with, but need not be limited to, the following questions:

- Where and how is political imagination practiced? What kinds of alternative social formations are articulated, enacted, and lived out in different contexts?
- How do different material arrangements, such as architecture, technologies, and material objects, shape the practices of imagination?

- What kinds of conceptions of social change are produced in the practices of political imagination?
- How should we theorise and rethink political imagination and social change in our current crisis-ridden political conjuncture?
- How do historical processes and legacies, such as colonialism and imperialism, shape the practices of political imagination and transformative politics?
- How do different spaces encourage, animate, block, or constrain imagination and utopian energies?
- How do various intersecting inequalities of class, gender, race, sexuality, and age affect the ways in which people imagine and act towards social change?
- What is the role of social movements, intentional communities, lifestyle politics, and diverse everyday forms of resistance in creating political imagination and prefiguring political alternatives?
- How can we methodologically approach political imagination?



Submission instructions

The special issue welcomes research articles (between 5k-7k words) and Sociology in Action pieces (between 2k-4k words). More information on Sociology in Action pieces can be found [here](#). We also welcome Beyond the Text pieces that publish innovative and creative work generated as a product of social science research or as an expression of research participation, collaboration and output. The Beyond the Text guidelines can be found [here](#).

The guest editors invite abstracts along with a biographical note about the authors in the first instance. The guest editors will review the abstracts and invite a selection to submit full papers to the journal for the normal SRO peer review processes. Papers selected after full peer review will be published in the special issue.

Please submit your abstract (300-400 words) and a biographical note to: polima@utu.fi

Deadline for submission of abstracts for the special issue: 12 June 2023

Notification of decisions on abstracts: 21 June 2023

For further information and queries, please contact the guest editors: Suvi Salmenniemi (suvi.salmenniemi@utu.fi), Hanna Ylöstalo (hanna.ylostalo@utu.fi) or Inna Perheentupa (inna.perheentupa@utu.fi).

Sociological Research Online is published by the [British Sociological Association](#) and [SAGE Publications](#). It is a peer reviewed journal publishing research within the full range of sociological enquiry, in a variety of formats and publication types from research articles to creative outputs represented by Beyond the Text. For full information about the journal, please visit the [SRO website](#).

References

- Allen, A. (2015) Emancipation without utopia. *Hypatia* 30(3): 513-529.
- Eskelinen, T. (2020, ed.) *The Revival of Political Imagination*. London: Zed Books.
- Jacobsen, H. M. (2004) From Solid Modern Utopia to Liquid Modern Anti-Utopia? Tracing the Utopian Strand in the Sociology of Zygmunt Bauman. *Utopian Studies* 15(1), 63-87.
- Levitas R. (2013) *Utopia as Method*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Olin Wright, E. (2010) *Envisioning Real Utopias*. London: Verso.
- Sargisson, L. (2002) *Utopian Bodies and the Politics of Transgression*. London: Routledge.
- Savransky, M. (2022) Ecological uncivilisation: Precarious world-making after progress. *The Sociological Review* 70(2), 367-384.