

CALL FOR PAPERS for the Journal of Sociology, 2021 Special Issue

*Imagining rural futures in times of uncertainty and possibility: Progressing a transformative research agenda for rural sociology*

### Background

This Special Edition offers a critical opportunity to imagine the futures of rural societies and rural sociology at a time when, across the world, there has been an awakening of diverse publics to the reality that current and historical social and economic structures are leading to the demise of planetary health and human survival. In Australia and elsewhere, rural communities experience the challenges and potentials of environmental and social change in diverse ways, particularly considering the rural nature of many industries at the epicenter of the climate crisis. To begin, increasing droughts, floods and extreme weather are felt strongly in rural communities whose livelihoods are closely reliant on natural resources. The (mostly) rural activities of food production, resource extraction (water, minerals), land use change and long-distance transport also create significant CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, further underscoring the need to reimagine the transformation of rural economic development in line with ecological limits.

It is against this context that the social fabric of rural communities is situated, now and into the future. In particular, social inequalities related to essential services (healthcare, food, employment, education, housing) are significant in rural areas, often affecting young people, indigenous people and migrants disproportionately. Gender violence, racism and homophobia remain serious cultural challenges affecting rural people's safety, wellbeing and livelihoods. In Australia, for example, one woman is murdered each week by an intimate partner, with indigenous women experiencing physical violence more than three times the rate of non-indigenous women. Any reimagining of rural society will need to consider such deepening inequalities and shifting identities alongside people's capacities to affect desirable social change. Sociological insights into identity, culture, knowledge, power and agency are needed in order to progress understandings of rural transformation at this current critical juncture.

In every rural place, economic and environmental uncertainty combine with changing political and population dynamics to shape, constrain and enable new rural futures to emerge. Around the world, rural people constitute an important force shaping collective and individual resistance to climate change inaction, rural decline and business-as-usual. They are demonstrating lessons for resilience and transformation, and are driving important discursive, technological and policy shifts in response to an urgent social change agenda.

This Special Issue aims to illuminate sociological perspectives on, and potential solutions to, the ways that rural communities are attempting to transform in order to engage with rural futures. These futures are constrained and contested, but are also full of hope and possibility. It is this tension – between structural conditions and opportunities for agency – for rural people and in rural places that is the focus of this Special Issue.

### Focus of this Special Issue

This Special Issue of the Journal of Sociology aims to generate sociological attention to both the emergent futures of rural societies, and the contribution of rural sociology itself. By addressing a broad scope of themes relating to rural lives and places, the complexity of transforming rural futures will be brought into sharp focus. It will provide a platform for sociological scholars working in different contexts to share relevant expertise, theory, insights and applications with the purpose of progressing a transformative research agenda in rural sociology that engages with the challenges and possibilities of rural futures.

We have already identified some contributions for this Special Issue. However, we wish to invite scholars to help us fill some crucial gaps. We invite papers in this Special Edition that:

(1) Address current and emerging challenges to rural futures, specifically:

- energy transitions and/or resource extractivism
- the future of rural work and labour
- migration, refugees (to or from rural areas)
- crime, particularly related to political extremism or racism
- intersections/ comparisons between rural and urban experiences

and/or

(2) Articulate the value of sociological perspectives in enabling cross-boundary knowledges to emerge that recognise the need for future challenges to be understood with reference to local places and/or communities. In this endeavor we also invite proposals that engage with indigenous ways of knowing.

We seek contributions that examine these themes within pre-existing or new sociological frameworks. Both theoretical and empirical papers are welcome. We ask that authors will emphasise the significance of their findings or methods for thinking about alternative rural futures. *What is the connection between the social/economic/environmental contexts that inform the work, and the possibility for shifting towards new rural futures? What might be the consequences of inaction on these issues for rural futures?* In doing so, this Special Issue will make a substantive contribution to current rural sociological thought (and for sociology more broadly), as well as highlighting the relevance of sociological ideas for informing the future direction of rural societies.

## SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

Potential authors are invited to submit abstracts of up to 500 words by **31 October 2019**. Abstracts should provide an outline of the proposed paper, including its empirical and theoretical basis, and its contribution to the theme of rural futures from the perspective of rural sociology.

Abstracts should be emailed to: **Naomi Stekelenburg (assistant)**  
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**For any other queries, please contact the Special Issue editors directly:**

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We expect to inform successful authors by the **end of November 2019** with a provisional submission date for full papers of **31 August 2020**. The special issue will be published in December 2021.