Reflexive Modernization and the Crisis of Institutional "Apocalypse Blindness"

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SNR 540: Global Environmental Change

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December 2025

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Modernization over the last several centuries has been associated with expanding the scientific worldview and assurance of emancipation from nature (Turner 2018). However, increasing globalization, interconnectedness of individuals and social groups has revealed a setback within our institutional structure, "apocalypse blindness" (Mol, 2000; Turner, 2022). Apocalypse blindness is society's desensitization to escalating climate and environmental crises, leading to inaction even as risks grow increasingly severe. Globalization accelerates and spreads the consequences of industrial development, leading to increased risks such as the greenhouse effect and ozone depletion. These consequences are global and can't be linked to any one region, territory, nation, state, or country, meaning that traditional governance structures have no control over increasing problems (Mol, 2000).

Our traditional institutions were designed for modernity yet lack the capacity to address new dangers. Economic competition, multinational corporations, and complex global supply chains limit state capacity, leaving local governance too small for the larger problem at hand (Mol, 2000).

Science and technology once viewed as hopeful now increasingly occupy a paradoxical role. Scientific institutions are expected to identify global environmental risks, but they are seen as falling short in giving concrete lasting evidence of origins, consequences, and solutions for environmental impacts (Mol, 2000). This causes public trust to be eroded and rather creates social insecurity around science (Mol, 2000). This persistent sense of inability, rooted in society's viewpoint, drives the transition to reflexive modernization. Reflexive modernization is a new phase of modernity marked by globalization and characterized by constant examining and reshaping of social practices with new information (Mol, 2000). This is not an intentional

redesign of institutions but a reflex to confronting escalating global risks that can no longer be ignored (Towers, 2011).

This large shift begins with the conventional belief that social and natural systems can be ordered rationally and controlled through development. Our current environmental challenges are exposing a world where modernity is fighting the problems it created. The ultimate result is the unfolding of the global risk society, where the environmental crises generated by the modern industrial era can't be escaped by anyone (Turner, 2018). This shared fate compels the formation of a unified global society to confront our problems (Turner, 2018). Where is the threshold of destruction of the biosphere in relation to the global risk society?

The institutional "apocalypse blindness" of modernity in theory serves as a catalyst for systematic change (Mol, 2000). It forces the recognition that the environmental sphere must achieve independence from economics, compelling institutional transformations (Mol, 2000). The shift toward reflexive modernization, and the related concept of ecological modernization, gives the framework for institutional reform, based on shared risk to drive collective action to shifting governance (Turner, 2018). Is shared risk enough to drive a shift in societal views and a shift towards a "greener" governance? Just as complex as ecosystems are; anthropogenic forces, and the social "web" are just as complex. There are consequences and pieces that are not factored into our theory; we can't possibly imagine every possibility.

References

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