

Special Issue Call for Papers

Social Movements and Organizing towards (Un)Desirable Futures

Submission Deadline: 30 September 2025

Special Issue Editors:

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BACKGROUND

This Special Issue on Social Movements and Organizing towards (Un)Desirable Futures aims to advance our scholarly understanding of the role of social movements in organizing towards alternative futures. Social movements are one of the primary drivers of transformation in organizations and society; the collective action of social movements has opened avenues towards more democratic, egalitarian and ecological forms of work, production, and consumption in established markets as well as given rise to alternative organizations and moral markets. At the same time, authoritarian movements are increasingly on the rise and crafting their own ideas of desirable futures.

In the light of the serious problems of our times, we need a greater understanding of how actors mobilize collectively towards alternative futures. Despite the fact that most movements seek to set the future on a different trajectory, we currently lack a comprehensive view of social movements' structuring of and prefigurative organizing towards alternative futures, as well as of the role of inter-movement dynamics in future-making processes. This Special Issue seeks to curate scholarship on how social movements shift attention, resources, and action towards alternative futures, and the processes of contestation around "desirable" and "undesirable" futures.

AIMS & SCOPE OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE

Social movements come in many forms (Briscoe, King, & Leitzinger, 2018; De Bakker, Den Hond, King, & Weber, 2013), including highly visible protests (King & Soule, 2007), insider activism by employees (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016; Heucher, Alt, Soderstrom, Scully, & Glavas, 2024), and prefiguration, which involves enacting alternative futures in present practices (Monticelli, 2022; Reinecke, 2018; Schiller-Merkens, 2022a; Yates, 2015). Social movements'

explicit purpose of creating social change (or mobilizing against it) is intricately linked to the future and future-making. Movements mobilize through framing efforts that involve a prognostic element of articulating solutions to diagnose problems and provide strategies for addressing them (Benford & Snow, 2000). While not yet addressed explicitly in the literature, prognosis rests on imaginaries of alternative futures (Augustine, Soderstrom, Milner, & Weber, 2019; Beckert, 2013; Levy & Spicer, 2013); it involves articulating how a better way of living, working, producing or consuming is key to realizing a “desirable” future.

Social movements frequently go beyond merely voicing critique, constructively working towards alternative practices, organizations, and markets. Their future-making efforts have ushered in new occupations (Augustine, 2021; Augustine & King, 2022), organizational fields (Augustine & King, 2019; Lounsbury, 2005), moral markets (Balsiger, 2021; Georgallis & Lee, 2020; Hedberg & Lounsbury, 2021; Huybrechts, Haugh, & Doherty, 2024; Schiller-Merkens & Balsiger, 2019), and organizations prefiguring alternatives to neoliberal capitalism (de Coster & Zanoni, 2022; Parker, Cheney, Fournier, & Land, 2014; Schiller-Merkens, 2022a). The future and future-making, it seems, are core to social movements.

However, studies of social movements often lack an explicit theorization around future-making processes. Likewise, the burgeoning literature on temporality in organization studies (Bansal, Reinecke, Suddaby, & Langlely, 2022; Kim, Bansal, & Haugh, 2019; Maclean, Harvey, Suddaby, & Coraiola, 2023; Reinecke & Ansari, 2017) has not deeply engaged with the role of movements in shaping alternative futures. At the same time, organizational scholars are calling for more theorizing and studies of future-making practices (Gümüşay & Reinecke, 2022; Mische, 2009; Wenzel, Krämer, Koch, & Reckwitz, 2020). Without linking these literatures, we are missing a deep understanding of how social movements, as one of the key engines for social transformation, imagine alternative futures and go about organizing towards these futures.

Understanding the future-making efforts of social movements is of crucial importance for the future of our societies, particularly in the light of the serious social, environmental and political problems that we face (Gümüşay, Marti, Trittin-Ulbrich, & Wickert, 2022; Wickert, Post, Doh, Prescott, & Prencipe, 2021) and the potential transformative role of movements in addressing them (King & Carberry, 2020; Schiller-Merkens, 2022b; Schiller-Merkens & Degens, 2024; Zanoni, Contu, Healy, & Mir, 2017).

However, the future-making processes of social movements are also shaped by counter-mobilizations and contestation around competing imaginaries of desirable futures. Movements are ideologically motivated collectives, and therefore they compete and conflict with other movements for control over imaginaries of the future. What is desirable to one group can be undesirable for another. Literature in organization and management studies has tended to associate desirable futures with the values driving emancipatory and democratizing movements as well as with prefigurative forms of organizing such as horizontal decision-making, democratic participation and self-organization (e.g., Gümüşay & Reinecke, 2024). However, authoritarian movements deem such alternative futures as undesirable and actively mobilize for authoritarian, non-inclusive, non-diverse and anti-feminist futures that underpin the rise of populism, racism and right-wing extremism (Adler et al., 2023; Caiani & Della Porta, 2018). These competing ideas of what is desirable drive inter-movement dynamics.

Relatedly, sociologists and political scientists have shown that activism, especially in the extreme, can trigger backlash (Ebbinghaus, Bailey, & Rubel, 2024; Wasow, 2020). As movements arise and evolve, each with contending hopes, dreams, and desires for the future, we need an understanding of how movements and counter-movements compete for, and construct “desirable” futures. Movements cannot be taken in isolation; more work is needed to examine the inter-movement dynamics in future-making processes, their outcomes, and

how they are re-structuring organizations and markets, as well as affect the social-ecological transformation of the economy.

With this SI, we call for submissions that build bridges between research on social movements and organizations on the one hand, and on temporality with a key focus on future-making on the other hand. Additionally, we are open to studies that push beyond our existing scholarly norms to enable novelty in evaluating futures and enacting disciplined imaginations (for a recent example of how this can be done, see Boe-Lillegraven, Georgallis, and Kolk, 2023). We acknowledge that the study of movements' efforts at organizing towards the future may require unconventional empirical and epistemological approaches (Gümüşay & Reinecke, 2022, 2024; Hanisch, 2024).

Some questions that we seek to address in this SI include:

- 1) Can we better understand the impact of movements' **prefigurative and alternative organizing** efforts in shaping the future? How do contentious forms of activism and prefigurative organizing interact in mobilizing and organizing towards alternative futures? And what are the impacts of prefigurative versus contentious forms of activism on restructuring organizations, markets, and fields?
- 2) Future-making involves ongoing **moralizing work** of delineating "desirable" from "undesirable" futures. What are the values and practices at play in this moralizing work? How do future imaginaries and future-making practices intersect with claims of morality? Which future imaginaries lie behind divergent moralities of markets? How does morality play into or work against the economic interests and values of certain actors? And how do competing movements attempt to moralize different potential futures in organizations, markets, and fields?
- 3) What are future imaginaries of **movements that have not traditionally been our focus**? How can we better understand authoritarian, populist, or non-emancipatory movements' organizing towards the future? How do they mobilize towards their desirable futures (at times by using the same tactics as emancipatory movements, e.g., Dannemann, 2023; Futrell & Simi, 2004), and how are these future-making effects affecting the social-ecological transformation of the economy and markets?
- 4) What are the unintended consequences of movements' efforts to bring about "desirable" futures? Whose imaginaries become more desirable in which organizations, markets, and fields? What are the **inter-movement dynamics** across the **plurality of movements** that advocate for various "desirable" futures?
- 5) What role do **emotions** play in enabling movements to shape the future? For example, what is the impact of fear and despair versus hope and confidence of a better future on future-making practices (DeCelles, Sonenshein, & King, 2020)? Which kinds of emotions are evoked in the moralizing work of desirable futures and in the future-making practices of different movements, and what are the effects?

SPECIAL ISSUE EVENTS

Pre-submission deadline: The guest editors will organize a PDW on *Social Movements and Organizing Desirable Futures* and a sub-theme on *The Future of Activism* at EGOS 2025. Both

activities will help create a community surrounding the questions at the heart of the SI and progress submissions for the SI. Participation in these workshops does not guarantee acceptance of the paper in the Special Issue and attendance is not a prerequisite for publication.

Post-submission deadline: The special issue editors will organize a revision workshop in Spring 2026 (exact location, date, time and format TBA). Authors who receive a “revise and resubmit” (R&R) decision on their manuscript will be invited to attend this workshop. Participation in the workshop does not guarantee acceptance of the paper in the Special Issue and attendance is not a prerequisite for publication.

SUBMISSION PROCESS AND DEADLINES

- Submission deadline: 30 September 2025
- Expected publication: 2027
- Submissions should be prepared using the JMS Manuscript Preparation Guidelines
- (<http://www.socadms.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/JMS-ManuscriptPreparationGuidelines.pdf>)
- Manuscripts should be submitted using the JMS ScholarOne system (<https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/jmstudies>)
- Articles will be reviewed according to the JMS double-blind review process.
- We welcome informal enquiries relating to the Special Issue, proposed topics, and potential fit with the Special Issue objectives. Please direct any questions on the Special Issue to the Special Issue Guest Editors:
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