

Abstract submitted by Olli Tammilehto

*Title:*

**The Present is Pregnant with a Social-ecological Future: The shadow society and societal phase shift**

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Societies can undergo rapid and deep structural changes. Such transformations happen, for example, in natural catastrophes and in revolutions. Grass-root democratic structures are often created in the place of hierarchies and capitalistic market relations.

What makes these transformations possible? An important factor is the fact that in every society there are many processes and structures which are not fully integrated to the prevailing arrangements of society and do not follow the predominant logic of functioning. They are in a way all the time pulling the society to another direction. You can speak of a shadow society that includes a sizeable shadow economy. In a crisis the shadow society comes to the front and expands rapidly taking new functions.

This transformation can be conceptualized in terms of dialectical philosophy as Bookchin did. It can also be formulated using concepts derived from the study of non-linear system dynamics including complexity and chaos theory. During recent decades regime shift theory – a form of chaos theory – has been widely used to understand the behaviour of local ecosystems and the global biogeophysical system. It may be useful also in getting grasp of rapid social transformations.

In the past “societal phase shifts” to grass-root democratic structures have usually been short-lived. Soon another phase shift back to the “normal” has occurred. This poses an important strategic question for social-ecological movements: what should be done now and in a future crisis situation to enhance the chances of the new mode of societal existence to endure and how to prevent the return of hierarchical power structures.

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Olli Tammilehto is an independent researcher, writer and activist. He has published ten books about global social-ecological issues. Most recent is “Tuhokehitys poikki – Yhteiskunnan olomuodon muutos” (“Stop to the Progress of Devastation – The Societal Phase Shift”, Into Publishers, Helsinki 2017, in Finnish). In his lectures (in the University of Helsinki and elsewhere) and in his writings he has often brought out the perspective of social ecology.