

Environment, Technology and Society

NEWSLETTER OF THE SECTION ON ENVIRONMENT AND TECHNOLOGY OF THE AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

SPRING 2008

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Teaching Environmental Sociology To the Undergraduate Student

Laurel Holland

Associate Professor, West Georgia State University

The undergraduate student often enrolls in an Environmental Sociology class with no prior knowledge of the field. The brave ones might admit their shortcomings before the first day of class, but most just hope that they are not the only ones to approach the topic blindly. If I had a dime for every time a student asked me, "What is Environmental Sociology?" I would be richer than the average associate professor. The short answer is easy – it always involves some variation of "the exploration of humans' interactions with the natural world." That response doesn't satisfy the really curious student, so I might go on to detail some of the topics to be addressed in lecture material, such as the relationship between the capitalist economy and environmental degradation, the environmental movement, or those who are most concerned about the environment and why. That seems to be enough information to pique initial interest, but then the hard part comes.

Most students have not taken Sociological Theory before enrolling in the Environmental Sociology class. The lack of a theoretical framework poses its own problem. Will a mini-theory lecture bring the student up to par for really exploring environmental issues? I think that it depends on the instructor's primary goals, but I find that, if I spend some time in the early part of the semester reviewing theories and relating theory to environmental issues, it pays off later in the semester. To address this challenge, I use the Humphrey & Buttel's (1982) model of "Culture, Power, and Class as Paradigmatic Assumptions." It is a good, basic introduction to the applications of conservative, managerial, and radical paradigms in the critical analysis of environmental problems.

One of the first exercises I assign is to apply one of these paradigms to a current environmental issue. A local issue, meaningful to students' everyday lives, serves best. Recently, I discussed the drought in Georgia and how the issue might be framed from Marxist, Durkheimian, and Weberian approaches. I encouraged students to consider which factor was most important---the actual rainfall shortage, the distribution of available water supplies, or those who make decisions about how water reaches our homes. I asked them to explore "ownership" of water and who makes the decisions to put a watering ban into place. Recent efforts by Georgia legislatures to move the state line to gain access to the Tennessee River

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helped students understand bureaucracy. Governor Perdue's framing of the problem as a faith based issue when he invited legislators to join him in a prayer vigil for rain was easily tweaked to symbolize the modern collective consciousness.

Illuminating global-local linkages aids students in appreciating the field of environmental sociology. I encourage and reward students for reading the newspaper, watching the news, and surfing the internet to find environmental news to share with their classmates. They are often surprised to find that a local industry has been cited for emitting toxins into the local water supply, or that the local Sierra Club sponsors a community garden. Of course, the most potent inducement I can offer to get them actively involved comes with an incentive: the opportunity to raise their grades. To that end, I offer a service learning project as an alternative to a paper or the final exam. I invite local activists and city officials to address the class on environmental issues so that students are well informed about options for community-based service work. This spring semester, a representative of "Keep Carroll Beautiful" spoke to the class, encouraging students to take canvas bags to go grocery shopping. Students adopted the practice so enthusiastically that, if I forget my own canvas bag and am reduced to carrying the store's plastic bags, I scurry to my car with my head down, praying that a student doesn't see me toting plastic and busts me!



Children, Youth and Environments: Special Issue on Children and Disasters

Lori Peek, Guest Editor

The number of natural disasters recorded globally has increased fourfold over the past three decades, growing from fewer than 100 in 1975 to more than 400 in 2005. Most scientists agree that economic losses and fatalities caused by disasters will continue to rise over the twenty-first century, and children are among those most at risk for death, injury, and trauma. Indeed, several recent catastrophes, including the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the 2005 Pakistan earthquake, and 2005's Hurricane Katrina, brought into sharp relief the pain that disasters may cause for the youngest victims. Researchers estimate that the tsunami claimed the lives of as many as 60,000 children, the Pakistan earthquake resulted in 18,000 child fatalities and destroyed 10,000 schools, and Katrina displaced over 160,000 children from the city of New Orleans. A recent report by Save the Children estimates that by the second decade of the twenty-first century, up to 175 million children will be affected each year by climate-related disasters alone.

A new issue of the journal *Children, Youth and Environments* explores the vulnerability and resilience of children in disasters. The issue contains a unique collection of 20 papers from around the world, which examine children's reactions to drought, tsunamis, hurricanes, volcanic eruptions, climate change, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Some of the contributions also consider the experiences of children who live in a constant state of disaster as a result of chronic poverty, violence, or unsafe living conditions.

Contributors from a variety of disciplines explore a number of topics, including children's risk for illness, injury, and death in disaster, psychological effects of traumatic events, negative educational impacts, and the effects of post-disaster displacement on health and well-being. Authors also examine post-disaster child protection responses in the United States and in international contexts, the importance of family and school support, and the need for post-disaster child care. Some of the papers focus specifically on children as active agents and the roles that they may play in terms of communicating risk, engaging in household and community preparedness activities, and participating in post-disaster rebuilding efforts.

With disaster risk on the rise worldwide, this special issue highlights the critical importance of focusing scholarly and applied attention on the special

vulnerabilities of children, while also working to understand how children can contribute to disaster preparedness, response, and recovery initiatives.

Children, Youth and Environments is an on-line journal published by the University of Colorado-Boulder. Check <http://www.colorado.edu/journals/cye/> for a full listing of papers and other resources that appear in the special issue on Children and Disasters (volume 18, number 1).



New Resource: Conservation Social Science Expert Directory

The Society for Conservation Biology's Social Science Working Group (SCB SSWG) announces the launch of the SSWG's new Conservation Social Science Expert Directory. This online Directory is designed to foster communication and collaboration among conservation social scientists, between social scientists and natural scientists, and between researchers and practitioners. Through its user-friendly search tool, the Directory provides easy access to the wealth of professional expertise within the conservation social science community. Users may search for conservation social scientists by name, location, discipline, geographic area, conservation and social science specialty, and research terms.

Interested in sharing your knowledge with conservation professionals around the world? Join the directory!

www.conbio.org/WorkingGroups/SSWG/network/dirindex.cfm

Publications

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Articles

Classical Marxism and the Second Law of Thermodynamics: Marx/Engels, the Heat Death of the Universe Hypothesis, and the Origins of Ecological Economics

John Bellamy Foster
Paul Burkett

Debt, Structural Adjustment, and Organic Water Pollution: A Cross-National Analysis

John M. Shandra, Eran Shor and Bruce London

Integrating Environment for Innovation: Experiences from Product Development in Paper and Packaging

Paula Kivimaa

Dialogues and Debates

George Monbiot on Management Research and Climate Change

Bettina B.F. Wittneben

Film Review

***Darwin's Nightmare* Directed by Hubert Sauper**

Andrew W. Jones

Book Review Essay

How Businesses Deliver Sustainability

Kumba Jallow

Book Reviews

***A Greener Faith: Religious Environmentalism and Our Planet's Future* by Roger Gottlieb**

Bronislaw Szerszynski

***City Trees: A Historical Geography From the Renaissance through the Nineteenth Century* by Henry W Lawrence**

Emily Brock

***Millipedes and Moon Tigers: Science and Policy in an Age of Extinction* by Steve Nash**

James J Smith

***Voluntary Carbon Markets: An International Business Guide to What They Are and How They Work* by Ricardo Bayon, Amanda Hawn and Katherine Hamilton**

Stephen Peake

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Articles

Conceptualizing a 'Sustainability Business Model'
Wendy Stubbs and Chris Cocklin

Tracking Industrial Land Use Conversions: A New Approach for Studying Relict Waste and Urban Development
Scott Frickel and James R. Elliott

Modern Institutions, Phenomenal Dissociations, and Destructiveness Toward Humans and the Environment
Kenneth A. Worthy

Citation Classics and Foundational Works

In Defense of the American West--Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness*
Timothy W. Luke

Archives of Organizational and Environmental Literature

Durkheim on the Environment: Ex Libris or Ex Cathedra? Introduction to Inaugural Lecture to a Course in Social Science, By Emile Durkheim 1887-1888
Eugene A. Rosa & Lauren Richter

Course in Social Science - Inaugural Lecture
Emile Durkheim

Book Review Essay

Developing Social Movement Studies by Reconnecting Resistance to Subjectivity and Domination
Ted Rutland

Book Reviews

***La Vie Campesina: Globalization and the Power of Peasants*, by Annette Aurelie Desmarais**
J Brem-Wilson

***Wendell Berry: Life and Work*, edited by Jason Peters**
Paul B. Thompson

***The Animals Reader: The Essential Classic and Contemporary Writings*, by Linda Kalof & Amy Fitzgerald**
Nicholas Malone

***Precautionary Politics: Principle and Practice in Confronting Environmental Risk*, by Kerry H. Whiteside**

Meira Hanson

Film Review

***Taking Liberties*, Directed by Chris Atkins**
Piers H.G. Stephens

Clark, Brett, John Bellamy Foster, and Richard York. 2007. "The Critique of Intelligent Design: Epicurus, Marx, Darwin, and Freud and the Materialist Defense of Science." *Theory and Society* 36(6): 515-546.

Clausen, Rebecca and Richard York. 2008. "Economic Growth and Marine Biodiversity: Examining Social Structural Influences on Marine Trophic Level Decline." *Conservation Biology* 22(2): 458-466.

Gould, Kenneth A., David N. Pellow, and Allan Schnaiberg. 2008. *The Treadmill of Production: Injustice and Unsustainability in the Global Economy*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.

Longo, Stefano and Richard York. 2008. "Agricultural Exports and the Environment: A Cross-National Study of Fertilizer and Pesticide Consumption." *Rural Sociology* 73(1): 82-104.

Overdeest Christine and Brian Mayer. Forthcoming. "Harnessing the Power of Information through Community Monitoring: Insights from Social Science." *Texas Law Review*. Vol. 86. Issue 7

Member News

Gene Rosa, Washington State, has recently given invited lectures on environmental and other grand risks in France, at the University of Paris for Political Studies (Sciences Po), University of Paris V (Rene Descartes University), and the Institute for the Study of Political Sciences, Montesquieu University, Bordeaux IV, as well as an invited keynote address at the Institute for Social Ecology in Vienna, Austria and an invited keynote address at the Michigan State University Risk Initiative Series. In addition he taught a short course on Structural Human Ecology and on the STIRPAT research program at the Vienna institute.

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