

SOCI 319 MIDTERM

(OUR NOTES)

LECTURE 1

Important Topics:

The social construction of nature
Constructivist perspective/analysis
Social context

Why is it relevant? What are some influences on our social construction of nature?

Social construction is often driven by motives and elites' motives tend to have more influence of this social construction. Capitalist ideals may oversee certain values of the environment, even when those values will benefit the same capitalist ideals in the long run. (Example of Venice freezing over - global warming is a result of continuous fossil fuel burning that is a massive industry both for the consumer and corporations/production. Conflict between industries (ie: lobbying).

The need for now rather than later. Elites at the top of corporate bureaucracies/hierarchies are largely driven by money (which is the consequence of the monetary incentive of labour created in a capitalist social construction) which ultimately means elites are interested in making money in their lifetime, rather than the wellbeing of the natural environment (including humans) in the long run)

Disconnection... Another influence on our social construction of nature is our disconnection from it. Those living in cities are less likely to care about the depletion and degradation of natural resources/species/landscapes because they simply don't experience it/ have an intimate connection with it. Likewise with corporations, humanity is lost in the objectivity of a bureaucracy. Emotions are left out, and elites may not even realize the harm they're doing. The Western world exploits the labour of other nations (ie: sweatshops, resource extraction, etc.) but aren't in those sweatshops or diamond mines every day experiencing the negatives that those populations are experiencing.

A good example of disconnection given by the prof... Hunting vs corporate agriculture/farming. We waste a lot of meat & veg because we don't experience the work & time that goes into producing it. When you hunt an animal, you're going to eat all of it because you witnessed the life that was taken for your food firsthand, and therefore see the disrespect of a life for not eating all of it.

Capitalism also means someone owns the means of production. This means that the first step in a product (let's say farming) is going to exploit people the most. The cheapest labour comes at these first steps and if people understood or experienced firsthand the hard & underpaid work that goes into their product maybe they would appreciate it more and waste less of it (similar to the hunting example).

Tragedy of the Commons... Self interest over the community. "I'm just one person I can afford to consume this much and it won't have an influence of the world." Meanwhile everyone thinks like that and leads to overconsumption by the community. Knowledge that is accepted by those with power will be used to control environmental resources.

Environmental Discourse

Discourse is the spoken and written language that not only represents the world but may materially change it. We have the physical world and the verbal world and we see the world through words when we're engaging in a book, education, media, etc. This creates grounds for manipulation, as words have an influence on our perspective of the world. Furthermore words change within languages. Inuits have 11 words for different types of snow, as that is the world they see and experience, but might have no words for activities or objects found in a tropical world/culture.

Discourse is therefor achieved through narratives, concepts, ideologies, signifying practices, and words themselves.

Even arguments... (Profs example of a global warming debate over a media platform: people see a climate change denier arguing with a climate change scientist and assume the issue to be a 50/50 debate)

Production of a discourse is supported by different institutions. More powerful ones have greater effect in creating and sustaining the discourses that benefit their ideals/goals.

Origins of these discourses are soon forgotten, and the discourse is taken as true without question - the power and problem with social media. It's extremely effective for sharing information, and this can be used for selflessness or selfishness, for good or for bad.

Social constructivists try to destabilize accepted discourses by exposing the origins of these discourses, the relations of power in which they were created, and the institutions that benefit from them.

Wilderness

The concept of wilderness (discourse) is one specific to Western/European cultures. Many cultures do not think of wild, untouched land as a concept.

The concept shifts, but always disguises human values as natural conditions (ex: a barren wasteland that should be dominated and civilized to a pure, untouched landscape that should be preserved. Preservation is a new concept birthed from an over consuming world.

It has often been applied to places that are inhabited by people with displacement and violence. It places the focus on places assumed to be wilderness and takes the focus away from other valuable natural areas or conditions.

The Limits of Constructivism

What about science? It is assumed to be an objective method for discovering the truth of nature, but practices and findings of science are still socially constructed.

What is decided as the truth? We don't really know. We can say something is blue, but to say why it's blue, no matter how sophisticated and well researched the explanation is, can't be considered 100% true. We don't know yet. In 100 years the explanation might change.

What counts as "good" science? Who decides? What are the topics that interest the scientific community and the agencies that fund them?

Think about the lobbying and corporate influence that goes into scientific research? Money and funding comes from somewhere, and the person providing that money can exert power as to what information is revealed, what information is left out/concealed, and how the theory is theorized. We can discover facts but as to how they're all connected is influenced by the bias of the theorist.

MI6 for example, is a privately owned intelligence agency that filters information for the government as even the government may be too unstable to deal with certain information. This concept applies to most outlets of information. Lying is only one form of misinformation.

Alternative facts.

Look at how the oil industry releases scientific information that is their favour. Universities tend to have more of an accurate/non-biased discovery and outlet of information as their incentives are often in the discovery of knowledge rather than their application.

Look at the paper mill industry and how cannabis was legalized because of the multiple applications of hemp, it's cheapness/ease to produce and the quickness of plant growth. So many jobs are on the line (in the paper industry), as well as techniques, machinery producers and investments that all make paper more of a niche market that less can tap into. Many people in this industry would therefore hate the threat of paper being an easily producible product that more people take part in. Paper would also then become a cheaper product. Takes away from the monopoly/oligarchy & creates more competition.

The threat of relativism... Relativism is the theory that all beliefs, truths, and facts are socially constructed in a particular social context. Cultures might share the same observation but have different ways of explaining it, that can then be misinterpreted and seen as incorrect. Many disputes between cultures come from this misinterpretation, which is why it's important to travel and understand the underlying communication behind words/actions. This is a product of cultural relativism.

So what information can we believe, or act on?

Most relativists will admit that there are influences other than social context. This is known as the “shades of relativism”

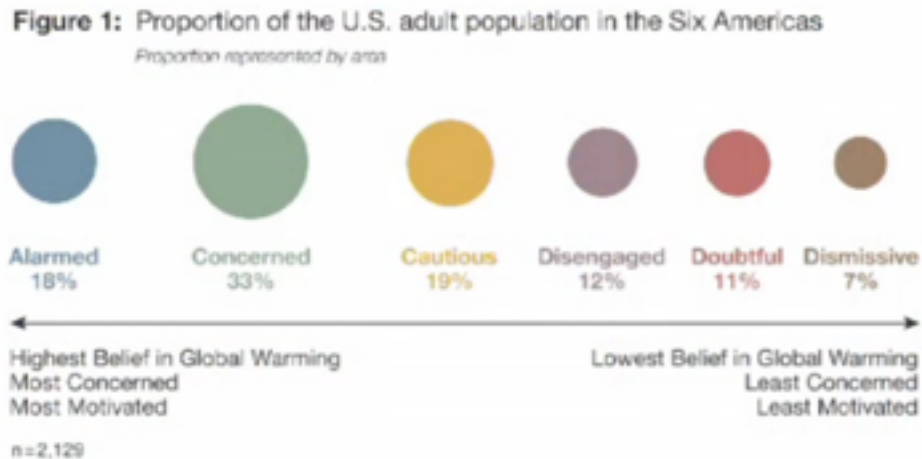
LECTURE 2

Important distinction between climate change and global warming.

Global warming is the term used to describe the current increase in the Earth's average temperature. **Climate change** refers not only to **global changes** in temperature but also to **changes** in wind, precipitation, the length of seasons as well as the strength and frequency of extreme weather events like droughts and floods.

The nature of climate change debate (historical matters; political manipulation; current biases; relevant sociological questions)

An example of this is the previous example of Venice... First time freezing over, crops suffer and product prices go up in price as a result. Some products may have to be imported, and this affects international trade and politics as a result.



Alarmed: Taking actions (issue public).

Concerned: See a distant problem.

Cautious: A little worried.

Disengaged: Neutral. Are not taking part in the issue.

Doubtful: Don't know if it's a problem but know it's important.

Dismissive: Think it's a hoax.

THE PORTIONS OF CATEGORIES ARE AFFECTED BY POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES, CLASS, CULTURE, ETC.

Importance and Challenge of Urban Areas

Capacity, infrastructure, density, disaster preparedness (New Orleans for example)

One productive result from urban areas damaged by natural disaster is the position to rebuild in economically-friendly ways.

Disconnection (as previously mentioned)... natural surroundings removed and so a tangible relationship is removed with it.

Low elevation coastal zones (LECZ)... Areas lower than 10m face great issues with sea level rise and natural disasters (tsunamis, monsoons, etc.). Especially those of low income and with large populations in those regions.

Tragedy of the Commons: We strive to be part of the community but also strive for individuality, and this is the parcel of Western capitalism. Our individual interests (when combined) end up having a strong, negative affect on our community. This is more common in cities.

Food Security

FAO unequal precariousness, vulnerability, and insecurity

The suffering of crops through climate change and natural disasters

Farmers' means to cope: cross-comparative considerations

Vulnerable populations: the poor, children, women, elderly

What Comes From These Negatively Affected Places? Refugees and Migration

2 million refugees from the UN's 49 poorest nations

This affects us and in the refugees in turn, due to **international law, politics, economics** and **social integration**. We get population displacement and conflict (competition, ethnic clashes, racism, etc.)

Solutions

Mitigation (somewhat effective - ex: tree planting, carbon tax, etc.)

Adaptation (ex: new technologies, crop improvement, reduction, green buildings, etc.)

Carbon Markets and Co2 Offsetting (not too effective - trading of emission credits, economic)

Geo-engineering (dangerous - ex: introducing iron into the ocean for the fertilization of phytoplankton - since we don't know the consequences of introducing new materials to an environment it goes against the precautionary principle.)

Pragmatic Behavioural Changes (check Carolan: household emission reduction higher impact than reducing to 0 petroleum refining, iron steel and aluminum manufacturing)

Too costly? The fallacies of ideologically twisted accounting systems. Things get cheaper when supported by the community rather than the lobbying of industries. One good strategy is to make green products cheaper, however this can only happen through development which will create more efficient methods to making such products (and thus cheaper).

*“Seeing as they bare a significant share of blame,
do affluent nations have a responsibility to help
the rest of the world adapt to climate change?”*

Carolan 2013

Commodity Treadmill

Things are designed (like technology) in a way that benefits the industry (ex: constantly needing newer versions, updates, compatible softwares/products, the integration of other products like apps on a smart phone).

Prof. gives example of how car engines are now designed differently so one must go to a professional mechanic. It's this attitude of preserving jobs that can be found all in industries, including the ones that are doing damage but people are too concerned about their jobs to to the right thing ethically.

Consumption allows this treadmill to work as we are constantly wanting more expensive and lavish products. Further more we products tend to feel greater in a context where we are reduced to less - the trap of too much wealth. Imagine an poor person in a third world country experiencing a smart phone for the first time, or how people in the '70s never questioned the size or make of their TV (Prof. example). If only we could learn this as a global community.

Biodiversity

It is the diversity of nature/species/plants/trees...

It matters because the relationships between species and their interactions affect sustainability (ex: cross pollination of bees and flowers, spreading of tree seeds through birds, etc.)

Global warming affects biodiversity as species migration will change to the new, appropriate environments, some species will go extinct and some colder places that warm up might introduce more biodiversity.

There's not just an aesthetic/spiritual benefit from biodiversity, but an industrial/commercial benefit too.

Some Other Important Concepts

Phylogenesis: the evolutionary development and diversification of a species or group of organisms, or of a particular feature of an organism.

Eco-System Services: definition, challenges & consequences.

Hot Spots & The Power of Conservation Maps: help us map out where problems are arising in terms of extinction and mass impact.

Bio-Cultural Diversity: diversity of life in all its manifestations: biological, cultural, and linguistic - assuming they all work together to evolve, they are interrelated

In-Situ and Ex-Situ Conservation: The preservation of components of biological diversity inside their natural habitats, and outside their natural habitats. This involves conservation of genetic resources, as well as wild and cultivated or species, and draws on a diverse body of techniques and facilities.

Memory Banking, Seed Banking: The storing agricultural techniques, seeds, species, etc.

Biopiracy: indigenous knowledge, politics of knowledge in conservation, complementarity of knowledges

Tragedy of the Commodity: Rather than being its saviour, commodification of "natural capital" contributes to the decline of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Solutions

Community conservation
Agro-biodiversity conservation
Seed banks
Consumers

Citizen involvement
Participatory management
Urban citizens

LECTURE 3

Governance

Environment: global scope of issues/national and international scope of governance - challenges.

Environmental refugees- displacement of people across national borders

Funtowicz and Ravetz

Funtowicz and Ravetz developed a model around system uncertainty and decision stakes

- Post-normal science
 - On a graph, this would be the area that includes high decision making and high system uncertainty
 - Same tools used to progress science was used to progress dangerous discoveries and can have negative consequences
- Professional consultancy
 - Medium levels of both variables
- Applied science
 - Low levels of both
- We have moved from applied to post-normal

American logic: 'We'll fix the environment when we have \$ to do so'

People aren't interested in the environment because solutions might be too vague or seem difficult to actually achieve

- Depending on the culture, it might not seem rational to take action or even discuss the environment
- Rationality varies from society to society

Welfare Economics; Discounted Futures

Welfare economics- a branch of micro economics that seeks to evaluate well-being, with the assumption that human well-being is wholly reducible to economic well-being

- Reduces all choices and things to economic terms
- Problematic because how does one put dollar value on biodiversity or on human life?
- Is justified by claiming its policies are 'fact based' rather than based on emotions and values
- Incapable of seeing its own flaws

Pareto Optimality Standard- a core economic principle driving and justifying cost-benefit analyses and welfare economics more generally

- This policy is accepted if 1 person benefits and no people are made worse off
- However, who is being helped doesn't matter and isn't specified
- Doesn't take into account non-humans, future generations, communities, etc.

People think in terms of how some things will harm them financially rather than looking at the harm of people

\$/people

Discounting ('tyranny of the present')

- High discount rates reduce the likelihood of sustainability because it does not look towards solutions for the future
- Only think in present terms and how to benefit immediately

Many people in economics are selfish and only have their own interest in mind. This is also the case in international business

- Countries assume every other country works they way, so countries also are very selfish
 - This is reflected in international policy

Common property regimes- where the members of a clearly distinguished group have a legal right to exclude non-members of that group from using a resource

Open access regimes- (open seas, atmosphere) have legal doctrine where there are no limits on who is authorized to use the resource

5 variables that contribute to resources being held as common rather than private:

- The value of harvestable resource is low per unit of area
- What can be harvested varies over time
- Investment in improvements yield smaller increases in the productivity of the resource
- Overall costs can be reduced if activities can be shared
- Infrastructure cost can be reduced if built on a larger scale

Social interaction can help break down the selfish mentality

- The ability to communicate and coordinate drastically alters outcomes
- Group settings/communication also alters this affect~are more willing to think about what's best for the collective

Rational Actor (Self Interest) Fallacy:

Tragedy of the commons

- procrastinating
- not thinking long-term
- reinforced within culture
- occurs when individuality is rewarded

Environmentality

This can simply be defined as the “different mentalities regarding the environment”.

Truth environmentalities: those who believe in spreading the truth about the environment

Sovereign environmentalities: nationalism-securing the logic of a sovereign state (nobody messes with it) kind of mentality

Disciplinary environmentalities: taxing, sanctions, tickets, prison, torture, beatings.. basically ways to enforce

Neoliberal environmentalities: thinking ahead mentality -should start investing in technologies that will help the environment in the future

Alternative liberation environmentalities: using the local environment or provided alternative measures to better the environment overall

Solutions

Tragedy of the Commons? Common Access

Multiple self interests > well being of the whole
So we must make the well being of the whole part of self interest)

Sustainability and the Discount Rates

Making sustainable solutions appealing to the customer.

Precautionary Principle VS Traditional Risk Assessment

PP refrains any action, even if we don't know what the consequence could be (they could be good). This is a very safe approach.

TRA tends to look at thing post-facto or continue actions with no particular evidence as to whether the action is good or bad.

More Definitions

Elinor Ostrom

- Won 2009 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences
- Believes CPR can also be a solution
 - More accurate long-range weather forecasts can create improvements in irrigation management, fish tracking/harvest management

The Precautionary Principle

- Taking any precautionary steps towards what could lead to future disasters and where future generations have to pay the price
- Delaney Clause 1958- an amendment to the Food, Drugs, and Cosmetic Act (1938)
 - States that any chemical additive proven to cause cancer can not be implemented into the product
- 2 applications of precautionary principle:
 - strong-makes the assumption that technologies are harmful until proven safe
 - that way, the responsibility of proof is placed on the industry rather than the public
 - weak
- precaution allows space/delays the dangerous effect/outcome
- once something is set in motion, it is hard to stop it. That is why it is important to take precautionous steps

-need more open decision-making structures

-social movements

-culture industry and the public good

-collaborative consumption

Ch. 13 Pragmatic Environmentalism in Action

-40% of adults worldwide have never heard of climate change

-average North American is exposed to 1,000 ads a day

worldview- a fundamental cognitive orientation shared by individuals within which is rooted entirely of their own knowledge

-by making nature separate from us, we objectify it

Ecofeminism- provides historical links between the objectification of women and nature

-Wisconsin's oldest residents, the Menominee, teach their children that people are supposed to be a part of nature, whereas, Anglo-European children are taught that nature needs to be protected from humans

- Menominee therefore spend more time in nature rather than use it as a backdrop

Implicatory denial- when we fail to respond according to the moral and rational codes of the day (citizens during Nazi Germany)

Collective denial-when thinking about climate change raises disturbing emotions of fear about the future, guilt, which are resisted through cultural practices such as emotion management, norms of conversation, and the use of narratives to justify past and present actions

Meyer and Staggenborg list 3 conditions that lead to countermovements:

- The original movement shows signs of success
- The interests of some population are threatened by the original movement's goals
- Political allies are able to aid an opposition

Sociological ambivalence- incompatible or contradictory normative expectations or attitudes, beliefs, and behavior assigned to a status in a society

Role strain- tensions that emerge when expectations from holding multiple roles clash

-Americans are overexposed to ads directed at appeals to extrinsic values (validation given to us by others)

-Social pressures to consume are driven through ads and class competition

Solutions

-could regulate ads for kids

-could create ad free zones (religious networks have them)

-ads are tax-deductible so by making companies pay for their ads, the money could go towards public services

Collective Consumption

- Ex. **Peer-to-peer renting**- the process of one private person renting an underused item of their to another person
 - Shifting from buying to renting
- **Car sharing**-short term rental (ex. Zipcar, car2go)
- Creates strong ties with people you already know and builds new ones as well

Carrotmob-consumer activism that rewards businesses for engaging in socially or environmentally responsible practices

Resource mobilization framework- focuses on internal organizational resources

Political opportunity approach- considers external factors (political context applied to the social construct)

Pragmatism- emphasized the dynamic emergent interplay between the process of constructing and reconstructing meaning through action and routine on one hand, and structures and the environment on the other

- Important of public to constantly reflect on and question habits and beliefs

-‘The most likely time for established rules to be reformed, is when existing institutions fail’- Dewey

-Talking and working together is a powerful force

New Environmental Paradigm (NEP)- a scale that measure and predicts one’s willingness to pay in contingent valuation studies

- The higher the score, the greater a person’s level of environmental beliefs or ecological worldview

Contingent evaluation- survey-based economic technique for placing value on nonmarket resources

Beliefs and Behaviours

Knowledge; worldview; ideology; culture; practice

Denial; Ambivalence; Apathy; Misinformation and the problem of post-truth

Consumerism, advertising, status

Post-materialism?

Don't like confronting the things that bother us, especially when they're distant issues.

Everything connected (B.E) which which is why we have to stop polluting the circulation systems in which all information and interact flows.

Tragedy of the commons (multiple self interests > well being of the whole)

Free-rider problem.

Small issues that add up tend to be ignored.

Visibility key for societal progression (we don't see the trash heaps in which our garbage goes - the disconnection renders a mentality where no consequences are processed)

Human interpretation of animals affect which ones get eaten and which ones are domesticated

Complex system (multiple systems combined) have dynamics and feedback loops that create intricate solutions that lie in the type of approach, the magnitude, the timing, etc.

Misinformation, hard-facts vs alternative-facts

Living within the consciousness of elites

Climate-change scientist vs anti-climate change scientist (often lobbied by petroleum companies) presented on TV gives the viewer a cloudy conclusion that 50% of the pop. agrees and 50% of the pop. disagrees, and that this issue is up in the air to debate.

LECTURE 4

(Ch. 12)

Inequality and Growth: Prosperity for All

Uneconomic Growth - growth that costs us more than it benefits us (growth that makes us less well off)

GDP only looks at the economic income growth but says nothing about the wealth and assets that underlie this income

Diminishing Marginal Utility - the more units of something we consume, the less added enjoyment we get from each additional unity

Happy Life Years (HLYs) - life expectancy at birth x happiness score

- Economic freedom has little impact on this

Innovation is actually enhanced by equality, as well as overall health and social issues

5 sociological mechanisms linked to increasing levels of consumption:

- Social comparison
- creation of self-identity
- specialization
- sociotechnical systems
- planned obsolescence

Conspicuous Consumption - the idea that we consume, in part, to display to others our social power and status

Our very sense of self is tied to consumption based on what lifestyle we choose to live by

Environmental Justice - the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies

- this means no population should be forced to bear the environmental burden placed upon them that affects their health, etc.

Environmental Racism - pollution-based racial discrimination

- can be traced back to civil rights era

The 1970's was when environmental concerns on people's health started to be raised by the public

Economism - the act of reducing the world to economic dimensions, a practice at the heart of welfare economics

- when looking at policy options, this places lesser value on lower socioeconomic statuses
- ethnic minority groups are most affected by this

Post-Growth Society

It has been argued that the historic link between output (GDP) growth and employment has been weakened/broken

Moving away from the obsession with growth would ultimately help solve inequality

Work-Spend Cycle - where we work in order to spend, not to save or be sustainable

Solutions

- restructuring the economy
- reducing work hours
- raising wages

Amartya Sen's Theory Of Justice:

Human Development Index (HDI) - factors in the country's life expectancy and measures literacy, education, and standards of living

- Focus is to give humans the focus it deserves over money through policies

Instead of producing products strictly to be sold, produce products that are in need for the people to flourish

Focus on capabilities

Not about the distribution of good and services, but about how individuals are able to use those goods and services

Happy Planet Index (HPI) - takes into account a country's ecological condition