

# Sociology's Engagement with the Environment (Take 2).

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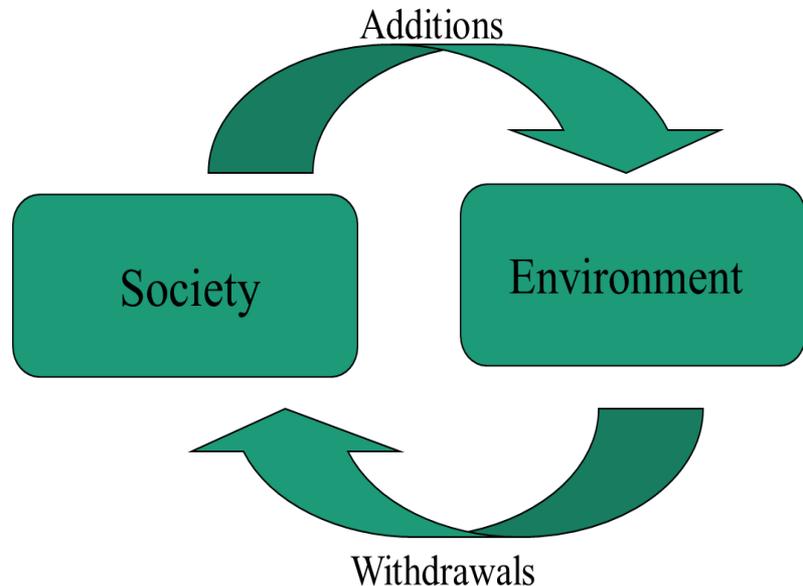


# Theoretical Perspectives on the Society-Environment Relationship

- “Environmental Sociology” Literature
  - Treadmill of Production
  - Overshoot
  - Metabolic Rift
- “Environmental State” Literature
  - Ecological Modernization
  - Reflexive Modernization
  - World Polity Perspective

# Treadmill of Production (ToP)

- There's an Enduring Conflict between economic growth and Environmental Quality
- Focus on the speeding up of society
  - Industrialization drives further industrialization
- Goal of the Treadmill:
  - To expand production and ecological extraction (additions and withdrawals)
- Competition drives the Treadmill



# Overshoot

- Based on the notion that humans have sustained society (and population growth) through consuming more than their carrying capacity
- Takeover Method
  - Stealing from Elsewhere
- Drawdown Method
  - Stealing from Elsewhen
- Phantom Carrying Capacity
  - “That portion of the population that cannot be permanently supported when temporally available resources become unavailable” (44-5).
- The Die-off

# Metabolic Rift

- This perspective argues that modern capitalism drives the growth imperative. It is a social metabolic system that operates in accord with its own logic, reducing nature and labor to serve capital accumulation.
- Focus on Contradictions of Capitalism
  - 1<sup>st</sup> is demand side and focuses on the alienation of labor
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> is supply side and focuses on the exploitation of the natural environment which is not infinite. It's the absolute general law of environmental degradation under capitalism (Foster 1992).

# Ecological Modernization

- Focus on superindustrialization driven by hybrid arrangements among state, market, and civil society actors.
- An ecological switchover is a “logical, necessary, and inevitable next stage in the development of the industrial system” (Spaargaren & Mol 1992:336).
- Argues that continued economic growth increases both technological advancement and environmental governance, which serve as the basis to mediate the environmental outcomes of development over time (Mol 2001).

# Reflexive Modernization/Risk Society

- It is “a radicalization of modernity, which breaks up the premises and contours of industrial society, and opens paths to another modernity” (Beck 1994: 3).
- Risk Society is first (The step after industrial society)
  - “Developmental phase of modern society in which the social, political, economic and individual risks increasingly tend to escape the institutions for monitoring and protection in industrial society” (1994: 5).
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  - Conflicts over good turn to conflicts over bads.
- Reflexive modernization is society’s “self-confrontation with the effects of risk society that cannot be dealt with and assimilated in the system of industrial society—as measured by the latter’s institutionalized standards” (1994: 6).

# World Polity Perspective

- Environmental State has emerged
  - “Environmental protection as a basic *purpose* of the nation-state” (Frank, Hironaka and Schofer 2000: 100).
- Blueprints for the state are drawn at the global level and diffuse down to individual countries.
  - “Contrary to the view that nation-states are autonomous actors shaped by internal preferences and interests...we propose instead that nation-states are enactors of wider world cultural institutions” (99).
- There is a growing degree of global cultural homogenization and social structure
- There is a level of isomorphism of organizational forms across world societies that is more significant than just functional necessity or task demands.

# Similarity and Differences Across Schools

## **“Environmental Sociology”**

- Focus on environmental degradation and crisis
- Economy leads social change
- No Clear “way out” (although social movements and red-green alliance)
- Includes states in all stages of development
- Relatively Pessimistic

## **“Environmental State”**

- Focus on environmental protection and regulation
- Coalitions form through hybrid arrangements
- Further Development is the “way out”
- Specific to Post-Industrial Stage of development
- Relatively Optimistic

# A Continuum of Society-Environment Relationships

