

# [Social constructionism in environmental sociology assignment](https://assignbuster.com/social-constructionism-in-environmental-sociology-assignment/)

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This construction of perceptions and meanings are what this essay is about. It is called social construction. The assay focuses more explicitly on the social construction Of environmental problems and issues. It does this by looking at examples of how and why certain societies can come to consider certain natural phenomena as environmental threats or issues, and asks the question of whether their perceptions are right or not. It focuses the concept of social constructionist and determines the relevance of it in environmental issues.

It does this by looking at past findings of attempts at deconstructing the perceptions some societies have on their own identified environmental problems to be able to see if it helped with solutions to the problems. And lastly, it identifies criticism leveled against social constructionist in environmental sociology. All to support the following hypothesis: It is important to take the social construction aspect into consideration when looking at certain environmental problems to be able to identify hidden agendas when it comes to solving the perceived problems.

But first, a brief definition of the social construction of environmental issues is necessary (As there are many- and some contradictory). It will serve as a foundation for building an understanding of what is going to be discussed. When something is socially constructed it then eggs the question of whether the threat or issue is in fact a real threat or issue because according to Hardball’s and Holbrook a social construct is a “ product of social definitions, not natural, biological categories” (2008: 752).

Now according to Marsh, Keating, Punch and Harden (2009) ‘ the environment’ as a concept, is always “ contested and changing” and he says that “ it means different things to different populations at different times”. What the social construction of environmental issues and problems then means is that people in different populations perceive an issue on the environment differently from one another. An environmental issue for one society may not be one for another society. It is because they constructed their realities independent from each other.

The independent development of perceptions allowed several dominant social constructs about the environment to emerge as separate independent realities. These realities were shaped and formed by power players in each society. The power players that shape a society’s opinion in contemporary lifer and therefore its perspective on things are among others “ the media, activists, [and] scientists” (Marsh et al, 2009). The following examples will illustrate how environmental issues may come to be instructed and considered important in one society, but not in another.

When the media of a particular population informs its members about the poor condition of their local water, the water may have been of poor quality even before the media announced it, but since the announcement was made it has been added to the member’s environmental reality. In effect of the announcement the people may start buying bottled water, local government would start addressing the ‘ issue’, they could create jobs to fight the ‘ issue’, and certain entrepreneurs may see potential for business. All of which that loud not have happened if the media did not bring the knowledge of it into the society’s reality.

In another society, the media may be focusing on how behind they are economically rather than writing about water quality. Even though it has a quality similar to the other society, people does not worry about it because people aren’t aware of it. In both societies people don’t get sick when drinking the Water, but the one society gave it an ‘ environmental issue’ label because of the media coverage it got. Another example is where scientists does research on something that is not considered dangerous to he environment, but after which it becomes an issue.

It happens because scientists usually have an elite status. They are considered experts in their fields, and most people do not have the knowledge or qualified degree to grant them alternative knowledge which would enable them to disregard scientists’ opinions and findings. So when a scientist, based on his own interpretations and gained knowledge, in one society declare something as an environmental issue, the people generally respond with acceptance. Another example of a construct of an environmental issue is one from an article based n dingo management on an Australian island (Heathen, K. Burns G, 2007). They look at the Fraser Island Dingo Management Strategy (FID’S) to deconstruct key assumptions about management of dingoes on Fraser Island. What they found was that the FID’S were trying to prevent dingo aggression towards humans, and that the FID’S constructed the issue of the aggression as deriving from human-dingo interactions via feeding. The prevention techniques were composed of many ways to prevent that type of interaction. Despite that, the dingoes remained as they were, still hurting people.

Heathen ND Burns concluded that the management should take to account “ a wider range of interpretations of human-dingo interactions” (2007: 55). One can see the importance the social construction aspect has in shaping priorities of societies when looking at the above examples. It is clear that when a society does not have knowledge on a subject, it is as if it does not exist. And when making the knowledge freely available as the only relevant knowledge, the society can do no different than to accept what they are being told by power players. The construction can be deliberately created by power players in society.

The government or managing scientists in a particular field can use their power to change perceptions of the society by publishing rational substantiations for their claims on a matter so that they can employ a policy or action that will benefit themselves or one that will contribute to solving a related problem of the matter without the society complaining about why they do it. It is clear from these examples that some constructed environmental issues are not real in terms true intentions as there are additional economic or monetary goals often hidden it the actions to ‘ solve’ he ‘ environmental problems’ identified by power players.

This is where social constructionist in environmental sociology comes in. When social environmentalists look at an environmental issue they try to consider the social construction aspect in the origin of the issue. By doing this they are able to deconstruct what has led to the construction of the problem, and thus identify the hidden agendas associated with policies claimed to solve the ‘ problem’. They can then ask the question: is it really an environmental problem if the social, cultural and economic spheres of human life are not actively affected by it?

The question may leave policy makers with a conscious thought about their true agendas, and enables them to determine for themselves whether or not they will be addressing a true environmental issue or not. The study on Dingo management shows how social constructionist has deconstructed a social construction of an environmental issue to bring hidden agendas to the surface. The notion that nature should be managed by humans has led to the notion that humans are in charge of it. Humans feel that they can use and manipulate nature to generate income (like tourism to wildlife parks etc. , and that is where the problem in management comes in.

The wellbeing of the nature and the economic capital it may generate produce a mixture of interests. One that wants to be green and one that wants to gain monetary profits. These two interests are contradictory because a monetary gain is sometimes gained at the expense of a green environmental gain. Now at the dingo management park, social constructionist showed why dingoes may be aggressive against humans. It showed that humans may not even belong there, or try to manage the dingoes because the fact is that dingoes are just a wild animal that react on instinct, and humans trying to control them could be causing the ‘ aggressive incidents’.

It showed that the management is actually catering for the safety of the humans at the expense of the dingoes (they kill dingoes deliberately to reduce their population). They cater for their safety because they bring in money, and the more safe they can make it for them, the more money they may receive. The hidden agendas (to generate monetary wealth) in the management and ‘ conservation’ of dingoes are actually letting dingoes getting killed instead Of getting ‘ conserved’ (Heathen, K. & Cooper, G, 2007: 48-55).

Even Hough social constructionist in environmental sociology may bring the question of whether an issue is real or not under discussion when policies need to be made, it still remains just that -a question. It does not provide an answer. It is not possible to give an answer because by stating that an environmental issue is not this, but it is that, would be contradictory to what social construction stands for. That is, that people construct definitions on matter by the available knowledge they have. But knowledge is limited by a person’s senses.