



## Environmental Sociology Approach From A Social Risk Perspective

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### Abstract

Environmental problems are a problem for society and are problems that threaten the patterns of social organization that exist in society because environmental problems are human creations, so humans must also find a solution. Social risk is related to uncertainty. This uncertainty occurs due to the lack or unavailability of sufficient information about what will happen. The sociological perspective is part of environmental analysis and is very important because society and the environment cannot be separated. Humans are the worst environmental risk due to their inability to recognize environmental problems and their lack of effort to tackle them. However, humans are also the key to solving environmental problems. It is not impossible for humans to prepare for good environmental risk management from now on. Environmental problems are a reality that must be faced by all humans on earth today. For this reason, a critical analysis of the social risks to society is required. Based on a literature review, modernization through the mastery of technology and science has created a technocratic society where the risk of environmental damage becomes a disaster for mankind.

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## 1. Introduction

There are two things that are inseparable: the environment and society, where people's behavior and human actions greatly influence the quality of the environment in the life in which they live. Environmental damage has become a very serious threat in all parts of the world, and we are already feeling the effects of climate change. The environment that suffered severe damage can be seen in deforestation, air pollution, and river pollution. In connection with society, which cannot be separated from the environment, the sociological perspective cannot be denied because forest destruction and pollution of air and water are fundamental things in environmental studies. Apart from intersecting with geographical, biological, technological, and economic conditions, environmental studies cannot be separated from the socio-cultural phenomena of a society. This is why environmental studies are always interdisciplinary.

Environmental damage can be interpreted as a process of deterioration or environmental degradation. This environmental deterioration is marked by the loss of soil, water, and air resources, the extinction of wild flora and fauna, and damage to ecosystems.

With regard to interdisciplinarity, Dickens (1996: 29–34) argues about the importance of the division of intellectual labor to overcome the problem of environmental damage. Three domains of science, namely biology, physics, and social, have relatedness and environmental problems that are studied in these three scientific domains (Dickens, 1996:31). Currently, in the era of contemporary sociology, environmental sociology is dominated by critical analysis and social construction. Based on this background, the author chooses a critical analysis of the culture of society that leads to a society at risk and how the socio-cultural conditions of modern society are related to risks to themselves and their environment.

Environmental risks that arise from human behavior are also increasingly confirmed through the World Economic Forum/WEF survey (2021), which states that the three highest risks that may occur in the next ten years are extreme weather, failure to overcome climate change, and environmental damage originating from human behavior. man. Similarly, the highest risk based on impact in the next ten years is communicable diseases, followed by failure to address climate change and other environmental risks.

Even though several studies have been carried out on this aspect from a social risk perspective, the aim is that the risk can be managed properly in order to minimize the impact that occurs by identifying, analyzing, and responding appropriately. This study of social risks to the





environment has an important role. Bearing in mind the large impact that will result if we are ignorant of the social risks that will arise, this research is intended to propose ways of managing social and sociological risks to the community environment.

## 2. Theoretical Study

Environmental sociology is a study in the discipline of sociology whose development is a necessity in the 21st century. The study of the environment becomes an interdisciplinary study because environmental phenomena intersect with geographical, biological, technological, political, and socio-cultural conditions. The contact between the environment and social conditions is explained by Dunlap and Marshall (2007: 329).

There is little doubt that environmental problems will be one of humanity's major concerns in the twenty-first century, and it is becoming apparent that sociologists can play an important role in shedding light on these problems and the steps that need to be taken to cope with them. While the study of environmental issues is an inherently interdisciplinary project, spanning the natural and social sciences as well as humanities. This stems from growing awareness of the fact that environmental problems are fundamentally social problems: They result from human social behavior, they are viewed as problematic because of their impact on humans (as well as other species), and their solution requires societal effort.

There are two main reasons why sociology examines the issue of risk: the physical, spatial, and social context and environment continue to change rapidly and unexpectedly. And from the perspective of environmental sociology, sociology as a scientific discipline has actually made changes to "mainstream" sociology, which has long developed as a science that studies social facts. "To legitimize sociology as a discipline, it was important to move away from explanations of, for example, racial and cultural differences in terms of biological and geographical factors, respectively" (Dunlap & Marshall, 2007: 330). Furthermore, in the journal *The American Sociologists* (1994), Dunlap & Catton argues for the importance of looking at social factors in studying environmental problems.

Why environmental sociology is needed is also revealed in *Introduction to Environmental Sociology, from Analysis to Action* (2009: 2-3) by McCarthy and Leslie King: sociological analysis is needed in studying the environment because problem solving is different from the natural sciences.





Sociologists, by focusing their research on questions of inequality, culture, power and politics, the relationship between government and economy, and other societal issues, bring a perspective to environmental problem-solving that is quite different from that of most natural physical scientists.

Based on the above, sociology, according to Hannigan (1995: 15), can make a positive contribution to environmental studies because environmental problems need to be solved from a socio-society perspective, and this is not merely a matter of the natural or exact sciences;

sociologists can make a positive contribution to the environmental debate by both incorporating and engaging. The former suggests that pockets or niches of environmental research can enrich mainstream sociological theory even if they do not as yet have the capacity to transform the discipline as a whole. The latter recognises that there is much to gain in applying the sociological imagination to the extra-disciplinary study of contemporary environmental issues; for example, through political economy models or via the sociology of science and knowledge. Alas, sociologists far too often end up as ‘underlabourers’ in this endeavour, being viewed as supporting actors in a cast dominated by natural scientists and environmental policy- makers (Hannigan, 1995:15).

Through sociological studies, environmental problems will be studied from the perspective of the behavior, actions, and culture of the community in interacting with the environment. For example, the action of someone who wants efficiency. Whereas environmental studies are interdisciplinary, Dickens (1996: 29–34) argues about the importance of the division of intellectual work to overcome the problem of environmental damage. The three domains of biological, physical, and social sciences have interrelationships, and environmental problems must be studied in these three scientific domains.

A key result is our failure to understand how social processes as understood by the social sciences combine with ecological and natural systems as understood by the natural and physical sciences. We are back to the question of ‘one science’ briefly mentioned by Marx a century and a half ago and later attempted by Engels. The situation now, however, has marched well beyond the ‘two sciences’ (one for ‘man’, the other for ‘nature’) as originally outlined by Marx. We now have three main forms of knowledge. Even this, of course, underestimates the extent of the debates within these areas of scientific work. It surely goes without saying that an adequate appreciation of humans’ relation with nature entails not only an understanding of the mechanisms within the physical, natural and social worlds but, just as importantly, of how these interact with one another. How can these interactions be envisaged This entail recognising that there are real causal mechanisms and powers within the physical, biological and social





worlds. It also entails recognising a stratified way in which these mechanisms and powers are organised and relate to one another. (Dickens, 1996: 31)

In today's era of contemporary sociology, environmental sociology is dominated by critical analysis and social construction. Relevant to the problem, the author chooses a critical analysis through the concept of a risk society.

### 3. Critical Theory of Modern Society

The Frankfurt School refers to a group of scientists who work at the Institut für Sozialforschung (Institute for Social Research) in Frankfurt. A number of scientists are in this institution: Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and Jürgen Habermas. Max Horkheimer, who led this institution at the time it reached its golden age, called the theory produced by scientists in this institution "critical theory. (Bertens, 1983:198-200). 'Critical' in Critical Theory has four characters, namely: 1) historical in nature, meaning that critical theory is developed based on concrete social situations; 2) critical theory is also critical of itself by criticizing and evaluating itself; 3) critical theory has suspicions about the actual problems of society; 4) critical theory is a 'theory with practical intent', namely a theory that does not separate itself from praxis. Thus, critical theory is built to encourage transformation in society, and this can only be done through praxis. (Hardiman, 1990: 58).

Two critical theory theorists, namely Adorno and Marcuse, made critical efforts towards the conditions of modern society in relation to the environment. Adorno argues that all theories of progress since the Enlightenment interpret history as a process involving humans and nature in conflict with one another. History is seen as human liberation from the clutches of nature. Meanwhile, humans can only free themselves from nature by subordinating nature to them. Man overcomes dependence on nature through organized mastery (Bertens 1983:189–190).

Adorno stated that, contrary to his expectations, humans who want to free themselves by controlling nature are now the object of this control. Instead of providing emancipation (liberation) for humans, science and technology have made humans objects of their own mastery (Bertens 1983:191). This criticism was continued by Herbert Marcuse, who stated that modern humans are one-dimensional humans.

According to Marcuse, humans are creatures that, by nature, crave happiness and are also entitled to happiness. The realization of happiness is entirely dependent on the actual satisfaction of a need, and for the first time in modern history, there is an objective possibility of realizing





that satisfaction. The prominent feature of modern industrial society is the role of science and technology. Rationality in this era is that humans have rationality and technological characteristics. Everything is seen and valued as much as it owns and controls. Used, used, manipulated, and handled. And from a technological perspective, instrumentalization is a key term. Starting from a way of thinking and acting that is only practiced in relation to nature. But then it is also applied to humans and all social aspects. In fact, it is not only that objects, nature, and machines are used and manipulated, but the same thing continues in all political, social, and cultural areas. Humans and society are not exempt from technological dominance and manipulation (Bertens 1983:193).

In the material field, today's human being can get whatever he wants at will, but he only wants what the system wants, so he wants the technological product (Bertens, 1983: 194–195). In an advanced industrial society, humans seem to be squeezed in a circle. On the one hand, productivity is increasing to enable greater consumption, but on the other hand, the only reason for consumption is to guarantee continued productivity and prosperity, so the industrial social system gives the impression it wants to promote human liberation, but in reality it is only aimed at slavery and alienation. Man thinks he has everything he wants, but in fact, he does not make others want more of what the totalitarian technological system deems necessary to maintain itself.

Adorno and Marcuse have long realized that science and technology can be a double-edged sword, on the one hand increasing human dignity, but on the other hand, through technocratic rationality, degrading humans by destroying the environment. Citing the opinion of Agger (2007: 175–176), the romantic effort of the Frankfurt school for its criticism of industrial society, which dominates the environment, is a step ahead and is even practiced by environmentalists and theorists of technology and nature. Adorno reminded us that social change should be measured to see to what extent it can save nature. The root of the problem is how modern society interacts with the environment. Dickens (1996:5–6) provides a distinction between how modern and traditional societies interact with their environment. This can be seen in the division of labor. The division of labor refers to the system of work specialization that characterizes all human societies in the world. As a result of this specialization, people become dependent on each other. But what is important but neglected is the inability of modern society to understand things related to nature.





#### 4. Environmental Problems and Risk in Society

The Frankfurt School's efforts to criticize the development of science and technology in the modern era, which creates natural imbalances, are continued by the sociologist Anthony Giddens, who questions how technology and science affect human life, which has the risk of creating unwanted consequences for the environment, health, and welfare.

In our daily perspective, the detrimental impacts produced by risks to the environment are increasingly visible. In cities around the world, people regularly use breathing gauze to combat air pollution, and flooding is a regular occurrence in many areas. Meanwhile, a series of diseases hit agricultural and livestock areas in many countries. All this points to the predictable and disastrous consequences of capitalist expansion. The detrimental impact of human actions on the environment is now accepted by scientific experts and policymakers (Beck, 2004: 42).

The perspective of a risk society provides an understanding of the environment in the following ways: First, Beck's thesis is aimed at one of the most urgent and significant problems in modern times. In simple terms, if the course of capitalist development is not changed, the planet's longevity will be limited. In the future, environmental hazards appear to be more risky; the ozone hole is getting bigger, climate change is trending, more land is under threat, infrastructure and industrial development are being certified, and the state of the world's oceans is deteriorating. Second, on a practical level, the societal risk argument highlights significant weaknesses in institutional procedures in law, politics, and science.

There is a relationship between risk society and risk culture. The idea of a society at risk intersects with the idea of a culture of risk. The notion of society at risk focuses on people and their social world. The idea of society is related to institutions, norms, and rules that are binding and always hierarchical among individual members in relation to their interests and goals. In contrast, cultural risk lies in non-institutional and anti-institutional associations and includes substantive values (Lash, 2005:44).

#### 5. Criticism of Modernization and Its Relation to the Environment

Through sociological studies, environmental problems will be studied from the aspects of behavior, actions and culture of society in interaction with the environment, where the focus of this field is the relationship between society and the environment in general. Environmental





sociology places special emphasis when studying the social factors that cause environmental problems, the impact of society on these problems, and efforts to solve these problems (focus on social processes), so as to socially determine these problems. This perspective is important because humans in their lives cannot be separated from the environment. Environmental problems have a relationship with the community as the manager.

As a study that emphasizes social factors related to social problems, one of the important things to do is criticize how society interacts with the environment. This is where the Frankfurt School, more than half a century ago, provided a critique of the relationship between humans and the environment. Modern society is a blueprint for a long history of modernism. There are many paradoxes in the culture of modern society. In addition, the development of science and technology has contributed to environmental damage.

The application of modernization and development ideology in third-world countries, including Indonesia, has led to the dominance of the state and large capital owners, which has an impact on environmental damage. Indonesia, as a country that is late in carrying out the industrialization process, carries out the process of economic development in various ways. The state and capital owners carry out the process of economic development, which then encourages capital accumulation, establishes state companies, invests, and encourages the creation of a business world, as well as regulations in the fields of industry and trade, all of which are carried out without sensitivity to the environment. In its implementation, modernization with state domination and capital owners raises environmental bias, which poses a risk to society.

## 6. Conclusion

Most of today's environmental problems are caused by human socio-economic activities, and the deterioration of the environment due to these activities affects the earth as a whole both now and in the future. Environmental problems are a reality that must be faced by all humans on earth today. Environmental problems are complex and must be solved using multidisciplinary approaches. Industrialization is the success of development to accelerate the rate of economic growth, but industrialization also contains environmental risks, which also pose risks to human life. Environmental issues are not merely technical and biological issues; they are social issues that must be approached through a socio cultural study of society. With environmental sociology studies, environmental problems can be studied more comprehensively.







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