

John Hannigan  
Environmental Sociology

Chapter 7:  
 Risk Construction

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1

"Risk" is an important concept in environmental sociology. Risk is viewed as being socially constructed.

How would you define "risk" as it is related to the environment? What risks are we taking?

Why is the idea of "risk" important to environmental sociologists?

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"Risk" has been defined as: a situation involving exposure to danger.

People define (socially construct) what is considered high risk. Stuart portrays "risk" as being as much an emotional response as a scientific finding.

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Do you agree that risk is socially constructed? If you think so, how can this be and by whom?

Businesses and interest groups interpret scientific findings and the subsequent risks differently.

Not surprisingly, interpretations have been found to favor the organization doing the interpreting.

Social, political, and economic forces define the level of risk, i.e., how "risky" something is.

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Stuart, and also Ulrich Beck who wrote *Risk Society*, argue that with the advent of emerging new technologies, society is taking more risks than ever.

Do you agree?  
 Can you think of an example?

Toxic chemicals found in everyday products (e.g., shampoos, cleaning supplies, electronics) are often not allowed in Europe but are in the U.S. These may be causing birth defects, hormonal disruption, neurological damage, etc.

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What factors cause a person to feel s/he is at risk (i.e., in danger)?

- Factors that we know little about and are difficult to observe are considered more risky
- Activities that are perceived to happen at any time as opposed to far in the future or over a very long time period are considered more risky
- Factors that we have little control over are considered more risky
- Factors that point to danger

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Stuart summarizes Hannigan's steps that must be accomplished for the public to define environmental conditions as highly risky such as a climate "crisis".

What steps are these (We've covered these in Hannigan's book)?

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1. Assembling the scientific evidence
2. Making the evidence understandable
3. Presenting or "framing" evidence to/for the public in an understandable way via media, public figures, etc.
4. "Contesting" or having public debates that gains the public's attention

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Nuclear micro reactors to hit the market  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4z8btEldwBs>

Bill Gates on How we're doing on the path to zero emissions, 2022 (3 min)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ipkPcrNsCv8>

Out of Thin Air (Start at 26:30) (13 mins)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ZeJZxjvFng>

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Why most Americans support the EPA (4:07)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G2Nmhcxf2k>

Sackett v. EPA: How One Couple's Battle Against the Feds Might Protect Your Land (7:38)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=40iHXAOjJ3U>

The Reasoning and Impact of the Supreme Court's Ruling in Sackett v. EPA (First 3 minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UMOSEoUy1pI>

Supreme Court decision weakens EPA authority, scales back scope of Clean Water Act

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f-ZBkxeCvEO>

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How Obama's EPA Nearly Bankrupted John Duarte's Farm (5:16)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qIBX6UoBfx8>

War on the EPA (3:00)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JJ1P9IcTGVY>

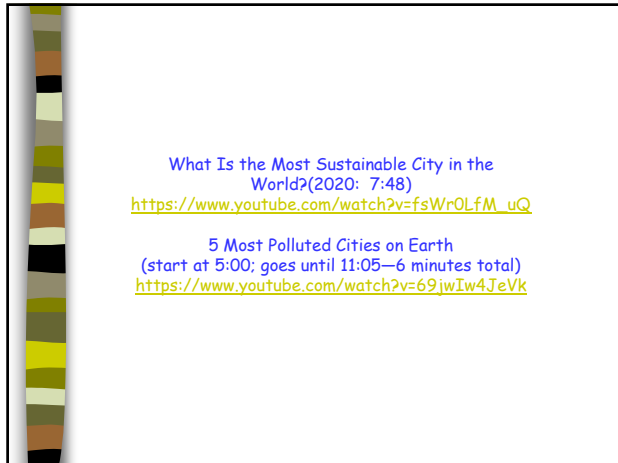
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The Future Of Nuclear Power - Holtec SMR 160 (8 min)  
[https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=The+Future+Of+Nuclear+Power+-+Holtec+SMR+160](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=The+Future+Of+Nuclear+Power+-+Holtec+SMR+160)

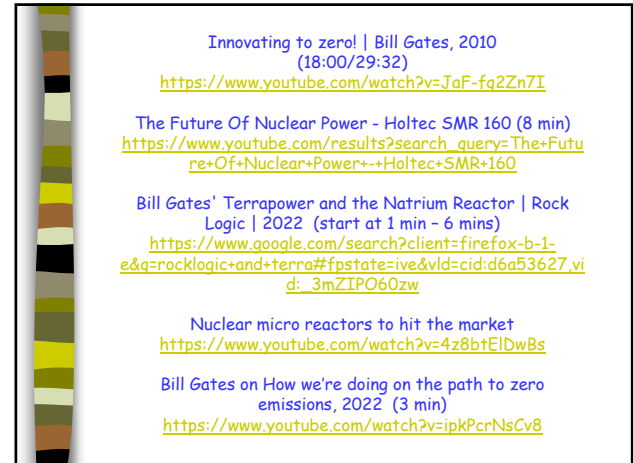
Nuclear micro reactors to hit the market (2:40)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4z8btEldwBs>

The tiny reactors carry some of the same challenges as large-scale nuclear, such as how to dispose of radioactive waste and how to make sure they are secure. Supporters say those issues can be managed and the benefits outweigh any risks.

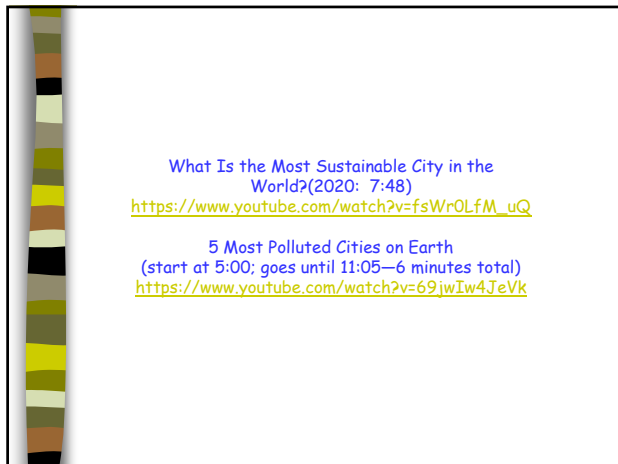
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