

14. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION  
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During the last few years, the issue of environmental protection has acquired considerable importance in public as well as in political discussions. This chapter demonstrates the extent of subjective awareness of environmental problems within the population. The individual's awareness of such problems is important for the implementation and success of environmental measures in two regards. First, it exerts pressure on political parties to legislate appropriate measures; second, these environmental measures relate, in part, to the behavior of every citizen and require his or her active participation for which a corresponding degree of problem-awareness is advantageous.

The following chapter on the subjective perception of damage to the environment and on environmental protection is based not only on the Welfare Surveys but also on the results of the "International Environment Survey" of the International Institute for Environment and Society at the *Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin*<sup>1</sup>.

14.1 ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS AND SATISFACTION WITH  
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

The 1982 Environment Survey documents general agreement among the population that environmental pollution is an urgent and growing problem. Ninety percent of the population believe that "Environmental pollution is increasing at a dangerous rate", "Mankind is misusing the environment in a dangerous manner", and "The threat to the environment is a great problem worldwide."

This consciousness is also reflected in a low level of satisfaction with environmental protection. Results of the Welfare Surveys indicate that in 1978 the level of satisfaction was already low and by 1984 had declined even further (see Table 14.1). In 1984, environmental protection was the only life domain with which the majority of German citizens were dissatisfied. Only one-fifth of the population expressed satisfaction with this domain; in 1978 it was double that. Between 1978 and 1984, the dissatisfaction increased in

Table 14.1: Satisfaction<sup>a</sup> with environmental protection by size of community 1978 and 1984

	Rather satisfied		Rather dissatisfied		Satisfaction	
	1978	1984	1978	1984	1978	1984
	in percent				Mean	
Total	40	22	39	58	5.0	3.8
Village	45	27	32	52	5.3	4.1
Small town (<30,000 inh.)	42	21	37	61	5.1	3.8
Medium-sized town (30,000 - 100,000 inh.)	45	20	35	58	5.2	3.7
Large town	34	22	48	61	4.5	3.7
Suburb	31	18	44	63	4.6	3.6

a) Scale of Satisfaction from 0-10: "rather satisfied" = 6-10; "rather dissatisfied" = 0-4.

Data Source: Wohlfahrtssurvey 1978, 1984.

all population groups: men and women, young and old, less-educated and well-educated, residents of both urban and rural areas.

In 1978 there was still a large urban-rural difference in the level of satisfaction with environmental protection; this difference had narrowed markedly by 1984 (see Table 14.1). In general, damage to the environment is greater in large towns than in rural areas. In 1978, this was reflected in a lower level of satisfaction among urban residents. At that time, almost one half of them were dissatisfied with environmental protection compared with one third of those who lived in rural areas. This difference indicates that in 1978 dissatisfaction with environmental protection was strongly influenced by the amount of perceived damage to one's own residential area. In the meantime, an awareness of the omnipresence and complexity of environmental problems apparently spread throughout the population – for example, as a result of discussions about the death of forests or the presence of toxins in foodstuffs. By 1984, residents of villages and small towns were nearly as dissatisfied as those in large towns.

LIVING CONDITIONS

Apart from the lessening of the urban-rural disparities, in 1984 there were still other considerable differences in levels of satisfaction within the population (see Table 14.2). As in 1978, the youth were more dissatisfied with environmental protection than were older persons. Persons with higher levels of education viewed the current status of environmental protection more negatively than those with less education. These differences in levels of satisfaction are closely related to differences in the value priorities of different generations and educational groups. Persons with Postmaterialist values, found primarily among younger and more highly-educated persons, were particularly dissatisfied with environmental protection. However, in view of

Table 14.2: Satisfaction<sup>a</sup> with environmental protection by demographic groups 1978 and 1984

	Rather satisfied		Rather dissatisfied		Satisfaction	
	1978	1984	1978	1984	1978	1984
	in percent				Mean	
Total	40	22	39	58	5.0	3.8
Sex						
Male	40	24	40	59	4.9	3.9
Female	41	21	38	58	5.0	3.8
Age						
18-30	32	15	49	72	4.4	3.1
31-44	43	22	37	60	5.1	3.8
45-64	44	25	34	53	5.2	4.1
65 +	42	27	36	47	5.2	4.5
Formal education						
Hauptschule	44	25	34	53	5.3	4.1
Mittlere Reife	38	22	41	57	4.8	3.8
Fachhochschulreife/Abitur	31	14	52	75	4.3	3.4
Value-type <sup>b</sup>						
Materialist	44	29	35	48	5.2	4.4
Mixed	40	22	37	56	5.0	3.9
Postmaterialist	22	8	61	86	3.8	2.5

a) Satisfaction-scale from 0-10: "rather satisfied"=6-10; "rather dissatisfied"=0-4.  
 b) Inglehart-Scale.

Data Source: Wohlfahrtssurvey 1978, 1984.

Table 14.3: Assessment of the urgency<sup>a</sup> of several environmental problems

Poisonous industrial waste	6.6	Energy problems	6.1
Nuclear waste	6.4	Destruction of town and country	5.9
Water pollution	6.4	Population growth	5.2
Air pollution	6.2	Noise pollution	5.1
Exploitation of the nature	6.1	Household refuse	5.0

a) Mean values of a scale from "1 = not urgent" to "7 = very urgent".

Data Source: International Environment Survey 1982.

Table 14.4: Perceived and desired responsibility for environmental protection as compared to other public tasks

	Current responsibility is attributed to:			The responsibility should rest with:		
	State	Other societal forces <sup>a</sup>	Other societal forces	State	Other societal forces	Other societal forces
Environmental protection	72	7	10	72	11	10
Public Transportation	73	11	2	73	14	2
Public utilities and waste management	74	9	3	74	14	3

a) See chapter 19.

the fact that in 1984 there was more dissatisfaction than satisfaction in all population groups, these differences become relatively unimportant. In 1978, only in a small, readily identifiable group of persons, the supporters of Post-materialist values, were the majority of persons dissatisfied. In this respect, it can be said that the advocates of the "new values" were the leaders in the general consciousness-raising within the population concerning environmental problems.

Table 14.3 provides further evidence that awareness of environmental problems is in no way limited to single issues or concrete living conditions. Degree of problem awareness varies little according to the kind of environmental problems. Noise pollution, population growth and the disposal of household refuse are merely regarded as somewhat less urgent.

#### 14.2 ATTRIBUTION OF RESPONSIBILITY AND DESIRE FOR CHANGE

Given the high degree of environmental awareness and corresponding dissatisfaction, it is understandable that 43 percent of those interviewed by the International Environment Survey feel that, in order to solve environmental problems, fundamental changes in society are necessary. Another forty-eight percent chose "improved scientific and technical development" as a better problem solving strategy. This must be interpreted as meaning that the current plight of the environment is considered not only a technical problem but also a political problem. However, the questionnaire left unasked the question of precisely which basic societal changes the respondents considered necessary.

The data from the Welfare Surveys can provide information regarding the extent to which dissatisfaction is associated with demands for changes in the locus of responsibility for environmental protection. First of all, it can be stated that the large majority of the population does not want a change in the assignment of responsibility. Nearly three-fourths of the citizens attribute current responsibility for environmental protection to the state and want it to remain there. Thus, the high degree of dissatisfaction with environmental protection is predominantly directed toward the state, but is not generally linked with a demand for a shift in responsibility from the state to other societal forces. This latter view is held by only eleven percent of the respondents and applies equally to other public functions (See Chapter 19).

However, more than for other state functions, a change in the opposite

direction is called for – that is, toward more state responsibility in environmental problems. This is in sharp contrast to “public utilities and waste management” and “public transportation” in which the requests for change are dominated by a demand for less state responsibility. Thus, a comparatively large section of the population does not attribute current responsibility for environmental protection to the state at all, but wishes that it were there. They name institutions and citizen action groups as currently having the most responsibility for environmental protection presumably because they are perceived as being most heavily involved with those issues. The demand that rather than these groups, the state should be primarily responsible for environmental protection can not be interpreted as representing a disapproving posture toward citizen initiatives. According to the investigation conducted using the International Environmental Survey “groups that support environmental protection (for example, citizen action groups or organizations which advocate the protection of nature)” are, on the whole, positively assessed. The results of 1982 show that on the average, on a scale of 1 (strongly disapprove) to 7 (strongly approve), such groups were valued at 5.4. Therefore, behind the demand for greater state responsibility is presumably the opinion that nonstate activities alone are not enough and that the state should do more for environmental protection.

This interpretation is further supported by the results of the International Environment Survey concerning the readiness of the citizens to pay more taxes for particular public expenditures. The disposition of citizens toward paying more or less taxes can be seen as an indication of the extent to which they consider a function neglected and would like the state to do more. Fourteen such functions were given. Readiness to pay proved to be the greatest for environmental protection while “transportation” and “public utilities” ranked only in ninth and twelfth place, respectively. This emphasizes again that citizens perceive environmental damage as one of the most urgent present day problems in West Germany as well as in other highly industrialized nations.

NOTE

<sup>1</sup> The results of the “International Environment Survey” which are presented in this chapter have been drawn from: Kessel, Hans: *Stand und Veränderung des Umweltbewußtseins in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, England und den Vereinigten Staaten*. Diskussionspapier IIUG/dp 83-9 des Internationalen Instituts für Umwelt und Gesellschaft des Wissenschaftszentrums Berlin, Berlin 1983.