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**THE NATURE AND STRUCTURE OF ATTITUDES
TOWARDS THE ENVIRONMENT**

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Degree of Masters of Arts

by
Dennis C. Morgan

Department of Sociology
Massey University
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ABSTRACT

It appears that environmental concern is becoming an important issue in contemporary society. At this stage little is known about New Zealand public opinion with respect to environmental issues. This thesis is an exploratory study within one typical region of New Zealand covering two electorates and with both urban and rural residents. It is an investigation into the nature and structure of attitudes towards the environment.

An underlying proposition that directs this thesis is that those people who are concerned about the environmental problem are confronted with alternative ideological networks which shape their perceptions of environmental problems and how they attempt to address these problems. Two ideological constructs and networks of belief have been advanced in other Western industrialized societies as dominant influences on the way in which people think about and act towards the environment. The primary intention of this investigation is to examine the extent to which the ecocentric and technocentric attitude structures occur in New Zealand. A self administered survey was conducted. The questionnaire was developed to assess the nature and structure of those belief systems, using Kerlinger's (1984) Criterial Referent Theory: - a "methodological theory" which explains social attitudes in the factor analytic tradition. In addition, this investigation also incorporated a partial replication of Cotgrove's (1982) survey of the nature and extent of support for environmental issues in Britain.

This thesis targeted four sample groups - the general population, decision makers, environmentalists, and manufacturers. The study of attitude structures revealed that for the general population ecocentrism and technocentrism operate as distinguishable and independent belief systems. The general population's environmental attitude is best described as a dualistic domain that draws upon both ideologies. It was a domain that had a substantial ecocentric bias and had as its strongest dimension a concern for environmental degradation. The ecocentric bias of the general population was a fairly universal phenomenon - emerging from most sections of the sample. The attitudes of the environmentalists, decision makers and the manufacturers exhibited a similar ecocentric bias but also revealed characteristic differences. The manufacturers revealed considerably more opposition to technocentric variables than was expected. Like the environmentalists their attitude domain was ecocentric but incorporated a minor technocentric orientation as well. The findings suggest that ecocentric ideology may be having a larger effect than technocentrism on the perception of environmental problems in New Zealand society today.

The partial replication of Cotgrove's (1982) survey produced similar results to those found by Cotgrove but with some important differences. One of the main differences was that manufacturers had a high rather than a low level of environmental concern. Finally this investigation has also revealed some evidence to tentatively support the notion that the influence of social class position and certain value commitments can account for some of the variation in technocentric and ecocentric attitudes.

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