

Environmentalism and social differentiation



A paper in memory of Steve Crook

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Abstract

This is a tribute to the late Steve Crook who shared with us the excitement of research on environmentalism. As we predicted, environmental activism in Australia remains socially circumscribed, but its scope, and the scope of environmental concerns, have been widening. Differentiation and proliferation of environmental issues combine with social diffusion and routinization. The proportion of people who see the environment as a salient issue continues to be relatively high, in spite of an increasing competition from new issue concerns, including security and illegal migration. The new 'white' environmental issues enter the public arena reflecting widespread (though less urgent) concerns about genetic modification of food-crops and cloning of human tissue – all interpreted as 'interference with nature'. The 'white' environmental issues attract the concern of new social categories of 'conscience environmentalists' who are more likely to be women, tend to be older, religious, and less attracted by green organizations. They are also less metropolitan in their location, and not as leftist and postmaterial in their value preferences as their 'green' and 'brown' predecessors. The formation of the 'white' environmental issue cluster and constituency opens the way for new ideological reinterpretations of environmental outlook – and for new political alliances.

Keywords: environmentalism, green issues, postmaterial values, public opinion, routinization, social movements

This article is a reflection on the themes that have been central in Steve Crook's research and writing, and that preoccupied him in his theoretical work, especially on social change. This is also a commemorative tribute to

his work, and an acknowledgement of our fond memory of him as a friend, fellow sociologist and an influential social thinker.

One of the central themes in Steve's theoretical work was social differentiation and its impact on social order (Crook, 1998; Crook et al., 1992; Pakulski and Crook, 1998a). This perspective and focus was a trademark of his work, and the work he shared with his colleagues. Also characteristic was the centrality of the sociology of knowledge, especially language and public discourse, in the continuous building and challenging of orderly patterns of human relationships in societies undergoing 'reflexive modernization'.

Steve saw environmentalism as a broad public concern with the human impact on nature, and located the environmental activism arising out of this concern within this general philosophical and macro-sociological framework. He adopted a constructivist framework in which continuous reproduction of social order (ordering) coincided with increasingly reflexive – that is cognitively self-directed and automatic – production and contestation of knowledge. In this perspective, environmentalism constituted a discursive domain, one of many domains competing for attention in public arenas, where interpretive schemes offered by issue-carriers, that is political entrepreneurs, media publicists and allied activists, engaged informed issue-constituencies and organized political groups (Crook, 1998; Crook and Pakulski, 1995; Hannigan, 1995; Hilgartner and Bosk, 1988; Pakulski et al., 1998; Spector and Kitsuse, 1973).

This competition for attention occurred, among other places, through the mass media. It involved raising and problematizing issues through 'framing', that is, interpretation within a broader semantic-ideological framework that forms a cognitive map and an interpretive filter for individual issues. It was an ever-changing process, defying the established theoretical predictions anchored in the old models of class interests, power coalitions and mobilization of resources. Steve always saw the strength of the movement through these constructivist glasses: as a capacity to set agendas of public concerns, to manage framing, to organize and mobilize effective issue-carriers, to cultivate public attention through effective innovation, and – perhaps most importantly – to successfully manage social differentiation.

We limit our attention here to the area of our common work, the issue of environmentalism in Australia. While quite specific – and only one of Steve's many interests – it occupied a special and quite central place in his research (e.g. Crook and Pakulski, 1995; Pakulski and Crook, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c; Pakulski et al., 1998). It was perhaps the main area where his key interests converged into a consistent analytic vision of sociological endeavour, and where his philosophical interests found the best 'applied' articulation. While we shared most elements of this vision, we, as collaborators, have always felt indebted to Steve's philosophical and sociological

insights, and to his generosity in sharing these insights with others. While reflecting on new developments in Australian environmentalism, we try to remain faithful to Steve's analytic and theoretical vision, and do what he himself would enjoy doing: confronting our past conclusions and predictions with an open and sceptical mind, ready to accept the evergreen reality and ever-surprising turns of events.

The rise of environmental concerns in Australia

One of the interesting peculiarities of Australian environmentalism is its unusual rise as a public concern (Pakulski and Crook, 1998a). It originated as an 'elite' preoccupation in the context of protests in the early 1970s directed against the damming of wild rivers in Tasmania for hydro-electric schemes. Such conservation-focused activism was unique at that time, and the Tasmanian greens claim to be pioneers of organized conservation environmentalism. The first green party, it is claimed, was spawned by this activism in Tasmania in 1972. At that time, however, public concerns about the environment were weak, restricted to small categories of educated urbanites. A combination of protest activism with widespread public concerns – a configuration that marks the environmental social movement 'proper' – started relatively late, in 1989–90.

Even as late as 1988, public concerns about 'the environment' were low among the Australian public, and were heavily concentrated among young, educated urbanites. The intensification and widening of these concerns were associated largely with the massive coverage of what were gradually interpreted as symptoms of 'environmental crisis' in 1989–90: freak weather patterns, toxic pollution, oil spills and, in particular, water pollution in Sydney that led to a temporary closure of popular beaches. These concerns coincided with the federal election campaign and for the first time environmental issues were in the political mainstream. The popular sense of urgency about 'matters environmental' shot up to unprecedented levels (from about 4 percent to 26 percent), declined slightly, and then stabilized on a relatively high level, just behind the standard trio of concerns: about health, unemployment and education (Tables 1 and 2).

We interpreted this stabilization *cum* slow and gradual decline in perceived salience of environmental issues as symptomatic of their routinization. Routinization of concerns involves a shift of public perceptions and interpretations from new and spectacular to familiar, normal and expected. The 'master clue' was the fact that the decline in public concerns followed a change in the way environmental issues were covered by the popular media, especially the daily press. The coverage of 'the environment' changed from sensational to regular, moved from front-page headlines to the inside pages where it was presented in 'columnized' fashion. This, we claimed, illustrated a more general regularity whereby all new issues enter

Table 1: Popular concerns about the environment (ENV) and defence/security (DES) in Australian public opinion polls 1980–2003 (percent)*

Year:	1980	1984	1988	1989	1990	1992	1995	1998	2001	2002	2003		
Most important issue (ENV)	4	4	4	F 7	J 26	19	11	15	9	M 11	O 9	14	17
Most important issue (DES)	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	2	1	4	16	28	21

* For the period 1975–86 the ENV question was about the problem of most concern; for the later period, the question was about the most important issue for the government to do something about. According to McAllister (1991), the sudden change in 1989 cannot be attributed to the altered wording. F – February; J – July; M – March; O – October.
 Source: Roy Morgan Research Centre. <http://www.roymorgan.com.au/>

Table 2: Relative salience of different issues – ranking 1992–2003

	1992	1995	1998	2001		2002	2003
				March	October		
Health/hospitals	6	4	2	2	2	1	1
Education/schools	3	5	3	1	1	2	2
Unemployment	1	1	1	4	5	5	5
Economy and finance	2	2	7	5	*	*	*
Social welfare/aged	4	3	4	3	3	4	7
Defence/security	*	*	*	*	7	3	3
<i>Environment</i>	7	6	*	7	*	7	4
Immigration	7	*	*	*	4	6	5
Taxation	*	*	5	5	6	*	*

* ranked below 7

Source: Roy Morgan Research Centre. <http://www.roymorgan.com.au/>

the agenda of public concerns. New issues have to compete for attention with more established issue repertoires, find champions among public figures and sympathetic journalists, and attract attention through ‘moral panics’. Our analysis covered the dynamics of public concerns, agenda setting and framing, issue clustering, and the emergence of new issue-carriers (Pakulski and Crook, 1998a). Perhaps the most important aspect of Australian environmentalism was a bifurcation of environmental concerns into ‘green’ and ‘brown’.

Green and brown environmentalism

The rise of the Australian environmental movement was unusual because, unlike the green movement in Europe and most parts of North America, Australian green activism was born with a strong conservation (‘green’)

focus. This was at the time when nature conservation was low on the agendas of western Greens, especially the powerful German Greens, preoccupied with issues of pollution, overdevelopment and waste disposal (including nuclear waste). Movement activism in Australia was narrowly socially circumscribed, and the environmental concerns of the public at large and those of environmentally active members of green groups and organizations differed considerably. While the latter were 'green' in their conservation-focus, the former were strongly 'brown' in colouring, focusing on the issues of pollution (especially coastal and water pollution), soil erosion and waste disposal (especially toxic waste). To put it another way, the concerns of the Australian public were mainly about 'ecological risks' – health and lifestyle implications of environmental degradation. The greenhouse effect, highly publicized in the context of freak weather patterns (droughts and floods), and the ozone 'hole' threatening carcinogenic radiation exposure, were also high on public agendas of concerns. By contrast, activists of environmental groups were concerned much more about the despoiling 'human impact on nature' in the form of logging native forests and the accompanying depletion of native flora and fauna.

This resulted in an interesting bifurcation of environmental coverage in the media. While the mass media focused on the health- and well-being-threatening 'brown' issues, the environmental campaigns focused on 'green' issues. The most widely publicized movement events (marches, protests, demonstrations) organized by environmental groups had a predominantly conservation focus. The 'green issue audience' was smaller, better-educated, younger (heavily dominated by 'baby-boomers'), more secular, more urban and more 'left-of-centre' than the 'brown issue audience'. The latter grew rapidly after 1989/90 because of the publicity given to pollution, toxic spills and other ecological 'risks'.

As predicted, this bifurcation, and its peculiar form, resulted in a specific political organization and ideological 'appropriation'. While more radical 'greens' were attracted to the budding Green parties (the federal one was formed in 1992) and the 'greening' Australian Democrats, with large proportions also supporting the ALP (Australian Labor Party) in the 1990 and 1993 federal elections, the 'browns', temporarily politically orphaned, were gradually drawn into the political orbit of the Coalition parties vying for the 'moderate' green vote. With this gradual political and ideological organization came an adjustment in the media interpretive schemes (frames). The more radical 'green' interpretations presented environmental problems as symptomatic of rampant consumer capitalism, while the 'brown' frames in the popular press represented a range of interpretations, mainly in terms of the side effects of large-scale industrial/agricultural production and consumption. Both of which lent themselves to effective regulation and reform.

Thus we noted a two-pronged routinization of environmental coverage and concerns. One was a popular one, with a strong 'brown' colouring; the

other was more radical and 'green'. The former promoted reformist-interventionist strategies; the latter called for a more radical rethinking of our way of life, including a protection of 'unspoiled' wilderness as a central value competing with socio-economic development. This bifurcation and routinization, we noted, took the thunder out of environmental issues and ended the monopoly of green groups in representing 'the environment'. But it did not indicate the 'ebbing of the green tide'. Rather, it was symptomatic of a victory of environmental publicity – which ironically signalled the demise of many environmental groups. By the mid-1990s we were 'all green today' (a statement attributed to Mrs Thatcher). In the conclusion of Crook and Pakulski (1995) we noted three developments:

- a continuous thematic proliferation and social diffusion of environmental issues;
- a continuous widening and modification of environmental frames accompanying routinization; and
- a reorganization of issue-constituencies and political groups claiming to represent environmental concerns.

Otherwise we declared the process of routinization as accomplished, and saw its political implications as articulated in the form of a 'brown'–'green' constituential and political divide (see also Pakulski and Crook, 1998a; Pakulski et al., 1998; Tranter and Pakulski, 1998).

Almost 10 years later, this picture requires modification, mainly because of the faster than anticipated proliferation and differentiation of environmental issues, and the emergence of another issue cluster, colour-coded here as 'white' environmental concerns.

The differentiation of environmental concerns

Environmentalism continues to widen in its social reach while differentiating and fragmenting internally. This proliferation *cum* internal fragmentation is accompanied by interesting semantic, ideological and organizational recomposition. Let us consider these processes in turn.

Proliferation and social diffusion

While environmental activism remains socially circumscribed and restricted to a relatively small, predominantly urban and educated minority, its scope has widened considerably over the last decade. As Table 3 shows, by 2001 more than 1 in 20 adult Australians were members of environmental groups (the range of these groups has also widened considerably) and further, 1 in 5 declared an interest in joining.¹ At the same time, environmental concerns have continued their rapid proliferation and social diffusion. This process has included a thematic proliferation – adding the adjectives 'environmental', 'ecological' and 'sustainable' to new areas of activity (e.g. design, engi-

neering, accounting, planning, banking) – and the multiplication of environmental frames, including a highly inclusive ‘ecological’ frame.

More interestingly, this proliferation combines with continuous social diffusion, a spread of environmental consciousness and concern through increasingly wide and diverse social categories. There are two indicators of this diffusion. First and foremost, the proportion of people who see the environment as a salient issue (deserving government intervention) continues to be high, in spite of increasing competition from new issue concerns, including those generated by terrorist attacks, illegal migration and war in Iraq. In 2002, the proportion of environmentally concerned people grew to 14 percent, five percentage points above the 2001 levels. In mid-2003 this proportion increased to 17 percent, placing the environment among the four most salient issue areas in Australia (Tables 1 and 2). A Roy Morgan survey asked a sample of Australians in mid-2000 to respond to the statement ‘I am a bit of a greenie at heart’. Again, a surprisingly high total of 55 percent of Australians agreed, women (57 percent) somewhat more frequently than men (52 percent). Predictably, the ‘baby-boomers’ (aged 50–64) were most likely to agree. Also predictably, the most frequent agreement (64 percent) was among tertiary educated Australians, and among the supporters of the Greens, Australian Democrats and the Australian Labor Party. More surprisingly, and in line with our previous findings about broadening diffusion, respondents in capital cities (55 percent) did not differ in their responses from respondents in country areas (53 percent).

High relative urgency

One of the conclusions of our analyses in the mid-1990s was that routinization made environmental concerns relatively immune to the vicissitudes of public attention, and to the declining sense of salience. The differentiating concerns covered increasingly broad ideological, value and party-political positions. They were no longer predominantly ‘left of centre’, ‘postmaterial’ and ‘libertarian’. They also entered the agenda of routine, and therefore lasting, public concerns.

This conclusion seems to be confirmed even further in 2003. The proliferation and diffusion accompany a relatively high sense of salience, as Tables 1–3 suggest. One can speculate about other reasons for these persistently high public perceptions of salience. Perhaps it is because the new concerns – including those about security and illegal immigration – are portrayed as ‘temporary’, in contrast to more ‘permanent’ environmental problems. Perhaps the policies of the government are seen as less successful in the areas of environmental protection and risk-reduction compared to the highly publicized – but successfully ‘managed’ – issue domains. There is no doubt that both ‘brown’ and ‘green’ issues continue to be regarded as salient and urgent. As Table 4 suggests, the new ‘white’ issues (GM and cloning) reinforce the concerns generated by their ‘green’ and ‘brown’

Table 3: Indicators of public concern about the environment and support for environmental groups, 1990–2001 (A – percent and B – rank)

	1990	1993	1996	2001
A: Support for environmental groups (%)				
Members	2.9	4.5	2.4	5.4
Consider joining	21.5	18.1	12.2	20.8
Not considered joining	59.8	51.5	48.3	46.9
Never join	15.7	25.9	37.1	26.9
B: Importance of environment in 12 months (rank)				
Most important issues	3	8	7	10
Second most important issue	3	7	7	8
N	(2037)	(2388)	(1797)	(2010)

Sources: Australian Election Studies (1990, 1993, 1996, 2001).

Table 4: Eight environmental concerns – a sense of urgency (percent)

	Pollution	Waste	Logging	Wildlife	Soil	Greenhouse GM	Cloning
Not urgent	1.6	1.3	5.4	1.3	1.7	3.4	33.0
	7.3	7.3	12.5	7.3	6.2	7.4	16.4
Fairly urgent	31.8	32.2	24.7	32.2	23.1	25.2	26.3
	19.7	23.5	19.3	23.5	23.8	23.1	15.1
Very urgent	39.5	35.8	38.1	35.8	45.2	40.9	28.6
N	(1951)	(1947)	(1934)	(1934)	(1929)	(1932)	(1930)
							(1940)

Source: Australian Election Study (2001).

predecessors, but are seen as less urgent – perhaps a reflection of the fact that they emerged in a less sensational manner than their predecessors.

The three processes – issue proliferation *cum* differentiation, social diffusion and routinization – are, of course, closely related. The broader the choice of environmental issues, the wider and more diverse are the audiences, and the easier is the process of routinization (framing and recognition as ‘normal’). In 2003 we have specialized ‘urban’ environmental issues, such as water pollution, as well as ‘rural’ issues, such as water shortages (irrigation) and soil erosion. We have ‘left’ environmental issues, such as logging, and ‘centre-right’ issues such as air pollution. We have secular environmental issues, such as biodiversity, and religious issues, such as ‘cloning human tissue’. This diversity and niche-issue proliferation seems to be increasing, thus challenging the boundaries of what is considered an ‘environmental concern’. Environmental/eco frames become universal

containers in which almost any issue, any concern could be fitted. That, in turn, facilitates their proliferation, routinization and social diffusion.

We saw this process in the mid-1990s as issue-cycles whereby issue clusters, raised by issue entrepreneurs and framed and publicized through the media, become routinized and politically organized as they spread through issue audiences. With the benefit of hindsight and current research, this process may be recast in a more continuous, evolutionary and relational framework. While some concerns become routinized, new issue concerns also appear, thus shifting public attention to new domains and sites where uncertainty and risk are located. The salience of these new domains depends on the relative sense of urgency – less alarming issues may be temporarily overshadowed and displaced by more immediate and alarming ‘risk areas’. While they are framed by the media, they mobilize attention of new issue audiences, and their pattern of social diffusion reflects this process of interpretive filtering.

Interestingly, the most urgent concerns are not necessarily the most anxiety-generating. Public anxiety may reflect ‘value relevance’ rather than urgency. This is illustrated by the emergence of anxiety-generating but less urgent ‘white’ concerns about genetic modification, and cloning. We call them ‘white’ environmental issues, in reference to the white coats of bio-scientists.

‘White’ environmental issue concerns

The late 1990s brought a number of highly publicized scientific and biotechnological developments in the areas of genome-charting and genetic manipulation, including gene-swapping and cloning. With the widespread modification of food crops and cloning of mammals, the scene was set for an important widening of environmental concerns in the direction of risks associated with ‘interference with nature’. This interference was initially presented within both more radical ‘green’ and more popular and moderate ‘brown’ frames. The former depicted genetic modification as a reckless corporate pursuit of profit that threatened natural eco-systems. The Tasmanian Green activists, for example, responded to genetic modification by supporting a ban on GM crops in order to protect the ‘clean and green’ island from ‘corporate despoiling’. The mainstream media picked mainly the ‘brown’ frame in which GM and cloning pose potential health threats and may require careful regulation (Hindmarsh and Lawrence, 2004).

These new environmental issues, as shown in Table 4, are regarded as less urgent than their ‘green’ and ‘brown’ predecessors. Perhaps this lower sense of urgency reflects both the absence of panics in media coverage and the way in which the ‘white’ issues are problematized. They nevertheless generate public anxiety and have been seen as a new area of uncertainty and risk related to biological-scientific research, rather than industrial

production and mass consumption. Of course, public concerns cover not just the laboratory research, but its outcomes and applications – GM food, engineered tissue, ‘artificially’ produced animals, and so on. Yet at the core of these concerns are broader moral implications for ‘humanity’ and ‘life’, and general concerns about ‘interference with nature’.

It is clear that the initial attempts at integration and absorption of the new ‘white’ issues into the old ‘green’ and ‘brown’ frames have failed. The issues related to genetic modification and cloning, including the highly publicized issue of stem cell harvesting, carved an independent space on the agendas of public concerns: the ‘white’ issues form an autonomous issue cluster (Table 5). The cluster functions in a broader context of concerns about the impact of bio-science and bio-technology on food, human life, health treatment and ‘natural’ eco-systems. A scan of the press coverage of these issues suggests there has been a new element in the coverage of these new issues and their ultimate framing as ‘environmental’ issues. It concerns the ‘moral threat’ they pose – a challenge to central human values. Genetic manipulation has been depicted as a potential threat to the core consideration of humanity – the integrity of nature and sacredness of life. Hence, the frequent clustering of cloning, ‘human spare parts’ and ‘Frankenstein food’.

New issue-constituencies – ‘conscience environmentalists’

Within the ‘white’ issue cluster one can identify two competing interpretive strains. The first depicts genetic manipulation as the profit-oriented corporate activity of (mainly North American) multinationals. The second depicts genetic manipulation as ecologically dangerous because it distorts ‘natural

Table 5: ‘Green’, ‘brown’ and ‘white’ issue concerns among the Australian public 2001 (factor loadings)

	<i>Factor 1</i> <i>‘Green’</i>	<i>Factor 2</i> <i>‘Brown’</i>	<i>Factor 3</i> <i>‘White’</i>
Pollution	.20	.71	-.03
Waste disposal	-.06	.97	.02
Logging forests	.80	.00	-.00
Wildlife destruction	.94	-.08	-.03
Soil degradation	.67	.07	.02
Greenhouse effect	.60	.13	.10
Genetically modified crops	.05	.00	.91
Cloning human tissue	-.02	-.01	.63

Notes: Maximum Likelihood Factor Analysis with oblique rotation. Two factors emerged using the default criteria of an eigen value of 1. Under the two-factor solution, the ‘green’ and ‘brown’ items shown in factors 1 and 2 above loaded on a single factor, with the two ‘white’ items on a second factor. However, for theoretical reasons we relaxed the default criteria and requested, or ‘forced’ three factors, resulting in the ‘green’, ‘brown’ and ‘white’ factor loadings shown here (high factor loadings are italicized).

Source: Australian Election Study (2001).

processes', instrumentalizes life and therefore challenges our core ethical principles, including the sanctity of life. Sanctity of life is aligned with the sanctity of nature. In more radical interpretations, genetic interference means tampering with God's design, and seems to be associated with the articulation of a new 'white' issue constituency – the 'conscience environmentalists'.

Who are these 'conscience environmentalists'? Our data (Tables 6 and 7) suggests that the 'white' issue cluster attracts a very diffuse social category that differs from the typical 'green' and 'brown' issue-constituencies in several respects. For a start, 'conscience environmentalists' are less attracted to green organizations than the 'green' and 'brown' constituencies. They are also older than their 'green' and 'brown' counterparts, with weaker representation of 'Generation X', less leftist and less postmaterial in their value

Table 6: Social characteristics of urgent environmental issue-audiences (percent)

	<i>Green</i>	<i>Brown</i>	<i>White</i>
Sample percentage	68.2	63.6	50.4
Women	-0.2	-0.1	+1.3
Men	+0.8	+0.5	-1.0
Generation X	+2.0	-0.9	-2.9
Baby-boomers	+2.1	+2.1	+3.1
Pre-WW II	-3.0	+1.0	+1.2
Degree	+5.1	+1.3	+3.1
Diploma	+4.4	+2.7	+5.4
Trade	+1.2	+0.2	-1.7
Non-trade qualification	-0.1	+5.3	0.0
No post-secondary	-2.2	-2.3	-1.4
Catholic	-6.4	-3.6	-1.4
Anglican	+3.2	+2.2	+2.6
Uniting	+4.3	-0.5	-2.3
Orthodox	-19.0	-14.4	-4.4
Presbyterian	-6.4	+7.2	-2.1
Other (not specified)	-3.1	-2.7	+5.9
No religion	+11.1	+6.6	-2.2
Left	+19.7	+10.1	+7.4
Centre	-1.2	-0.6	0.0
Right	-4.7	-1.4	-0.4
Postmaterial	+12.0	+8.7	+4.1
Mixed	+1.5	+2.2	+1.8
Materialist	-5.2	-4.8	-3.5
<i>N</i>	(1921)	(1940)	(1921)

Table 6: continued

	<i>Green</i>	<i>Brown</i>	<i>White</i>
Sample percentage	68.2	63.6	50.4
Env. group member	+20.5	+15.7	+3.4
Considered joining	+18.4	+18.3	+10.7
Not considered	+2.2	-0.7	+1.8
Never join	-17.2	-11.4	-8.2
N	(1921)	(1940)	(1921)

Notes: The responses to the following environmental issue concern questions where the categories Very urgent and Urgent combined. 'Green' = logging or wildlife preservation; 'Brown' = pollution or waste disposal; 'White' = cloning of human tissue or genetically modified crops. The figures are 'Over' (+) and 'Under' (-) representation in percentage points, in relation to the percentage in the full sample.

Source: Australian Election Study (2001).

preferences. Interestingly, they are less strongly and urgently concerned about the state of the environment – possibly a reflection of the strongly 'moral-ethical' nature of their preoccupations.

The formation of the 'white' environmental issue cluster, and the articulation of a socially diffuse 'conscience environmentalism', open the way for new ideological elaboration and reinterpretations of environmental outlook – and for new political alliances. Conscience environmentalists, like their 'brown' predecessors, are less politically organized, and less inclined to join left-of-centre, strongly secular green groups and parties. They form a wide but diverse constituency 'to-be-wooded' and to be politically organized – possibly on the conservative end of the political spectrum.

Conclusion

We have followed a model of analysis developed together with Steve Crook in the 1990s, and confronted this model with new data on environmental concerns. While we were right about the cyclical nature of public concerns, we may have underestimated the continuity and intensity of the process of issue-differentiation, concern-diffusion and routinization. Old issues are routinized, but new ones constantly emerge and enter the agenda of public concerns. The entry of new issues, as the history of the 'white' cluster shows, does not need to be on a wave of moral panic or crisis-publicity. The existing environmental frames are not only open enough to absorb the new issues but also facilitate issue-innovation. They are also flexible enough to attract issue audiences who in the past would shun environmental concerns.

Table 7: Green, Brown and White issue concerns (OLS)

	<i>Green</i>	<i>Brown</i>	<i>White</i>
Intercept	63.7	67.8	45.9
Women	2.1	1.1	3.6*
Generation X	-0.2	-4.5***	-1.5
Baby-boomers	1.1	-1.3	0.8
Pre-WW II	-	-	-
Degree	-3.3*	-4.2**	0.8
Professionals	2.4	1.9	-0.5
Large city	1.7	-1.3	-1.2
Religious attendance	-10.5***	-4.0*	-5.5*
Left-right	-9.6**	-2.0	-7.6
Postmaterial values	10.4***	7.8**	4.3
Env. group member	23.2***	15.3***	7.8*
Considered joining	20.5***	14.6***	13.3***
Not considered	9.3***	4.1**	6.4***
Never join	-	-	-
Dependent mean	71.3	71.9	52.6
R ²	.15	.08	.03
N	(1921)	(1940)	(1921)

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

Notes: Environmental issue concern dependent variables range between 0 and 100, where 0 represents low concern and 100 represents high concern. The scales were formed by combining the variables: 'logging' and 'wildlife' (green), 'pollution' and 'waste' (brown) and 'GM' and 'cloning' (white). Estimates are non-standardized regression coefficients from an Ordinary Least Squares regression.

Source: Australian Election Study (2001).

In the face of such developments, and the ongoing social diffusion of environmental awareness and concerns, we can conclude that environmental (predominantly 'green') groups will face further political dilemmas. They have not only lost their monopolistic position in representing environmental concerns, but are also losing control over environmental agendas. They thrived in the 1980s by profiting from the high sense of urgency generated by the publicity given to environmental conservation 'crises' and new risks associated with the 'assault on nature'. They also attracted a disproportionately high proportion of 'left-libertarian' baby-boomers whose postmaterial value concerns made them sensitive to 'green' issues. In a new climate, where environmental concerns move in the direction of the 'manipulation of nature' and 'moral' (rather than physical)

pollution, and in a situation when a new ‘post-boom’ generation – much less libertarian and more ‘materialist’ in its orientation – comes of age, the political contest starts almost anew. This opens political opportunities for new moral entrepreneurs, issue interpreters and political organizers – a situation that always fascinated Steve Crook. Steve saw accelerating change as a major challenge to sociology – a discipline whose survival depends on its capacity to respond to rapidly changing public concerns, uncertainties and risks. He shared this sense of excitement and sense of sociological mission with all of us, his collaborators. This excitement remains a lasting legacy of intellectual camaraderie and friendship. To emphasize this legacy, we would like to conclude with a quotation from Steve Crook’s 2000 TASA Presidential Address:

The relations between natural, technical and social processes lie at the heart of the fundamental issues from climate change to genetic engineering. Increasingly, these issues and others like them will move to the top of public and policy agendas. It is not simply cynicism and opportunism to argue that if sociology is to retain – or regain – its salience we must place these same issues at the top of our own agendas. Without a sociological dimension, public debate on scientific and technical questions will be radically impoverished. (Crook, 2003: 11)

Notes

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- 1 The analyses in Tables 3 to 7 rely upon data from the 2001 Australian Election Study (Bean et al., 2002). The AES has 2010 cases collected from a systematic sample (stratified by states), drawn from the Australian electoral roll via mail out/mail back administration. The AES achieved a response rate of 55 percent. Data were obtained through the Australian Social Sciences Data Archive in the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University.

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