

Health, Risk, and Environmental Justice

Lecture Part 2

SOC165

Spring 2010



In Part 2

- Risk Society and the Environment

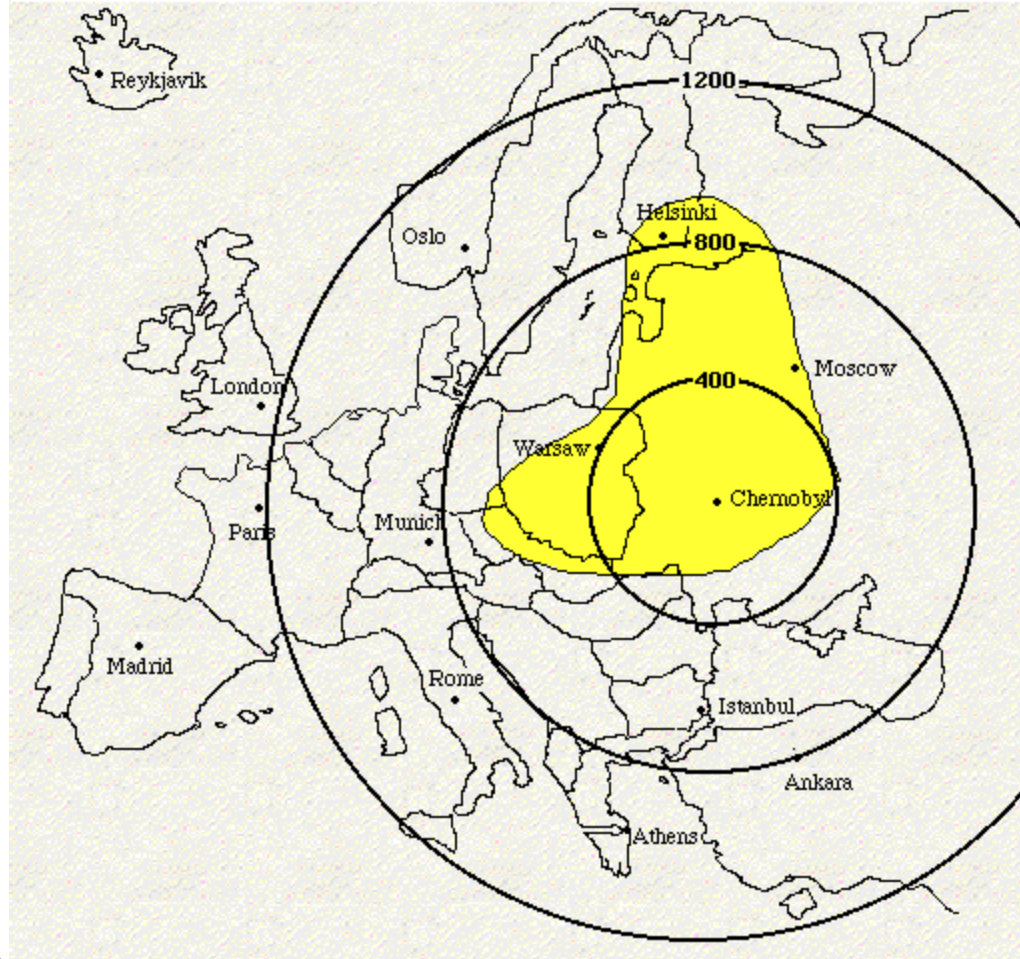


Risk and the Environment

- There have always been dangers & uncertainty in the world
- Ulrich Beck theorizes new reality of life today – *Risk* – connecting society, technology, and the environment
- Today's dangers are not limited by time and space
- Nuclear, genetic, chemical technologies threaten future generations, and can spread across borders



Example: Chernobyl, 1986



The Material and Ideal

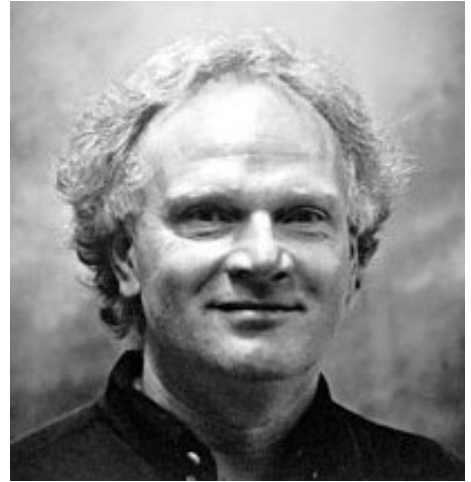
We experience risk as:

- Perceptions of problems
- Actual disruptions of human goals & intentions



Ulrich Beck's Risk Theory

- Historical view of development of society
- Shift from early modernity to late modernity
- Early modernity: referred to pre-modern times as reference point
- Late modernity: refers to earlier modernity; is “reflexive”

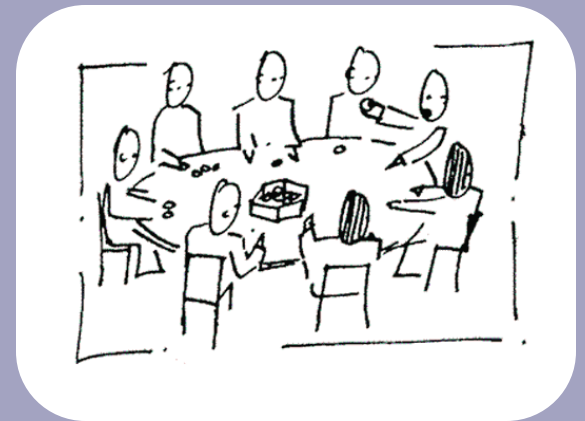


Ulrich Beck



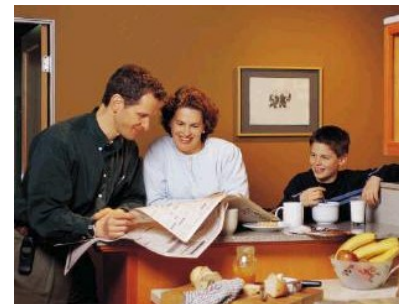
Ulrich Beck's Risk Theory

- Problem: new risks today threaten everyone
- Possible solutions:
 - Democracy
 - Inclusive decision-making
 - End to expert monopoly on discourse & political power
 - Precautionary principle should guide public policy



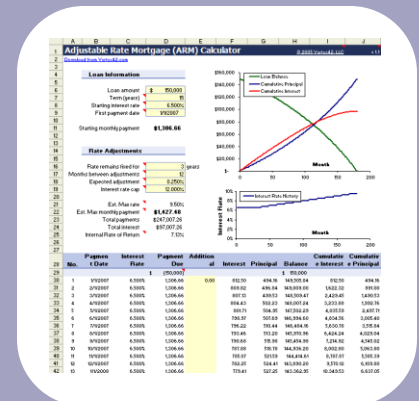
Environmental Risks in ČR?

- Temelín
- Food: pesticides, GMOs, additives, mad cow disease
- Fish: heavy metals?
- Indoor air quality: toxic materials; cleaning products
- Mobile phones: radiation?



Assessing and Managing Risk

- Rational choice theory / rational risk assessment
- Cost-benefit analysis = useful, but limited
- Not adequate to make public policy & production/consumption choices



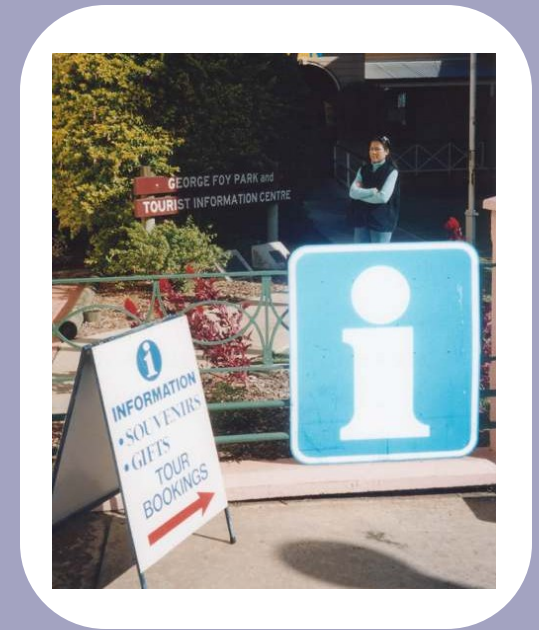
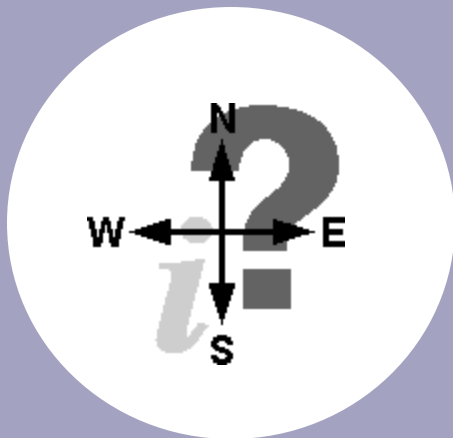
Assessing and Managing Risk

- Risk assessment always based on norms & values (“irrational” sentiment, cultural setting)
- Choice is always constrained by what we know/understand/believe and choices available within the culture
- Understanding of risk, and ability to take action is based on Knowledge, Power and Trust



Knowledge

- Who has the information?
- How is the information communicated & shared?
- Is the information accurate?



Knowledge

- Health and environmental information are basic rights
- UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights:

Article 25 (1): Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.



Knowledge

- According to Czech law and international law, environmental protection, health, and information are rights
- Czech constitution, Article 7 on Natural Resources:

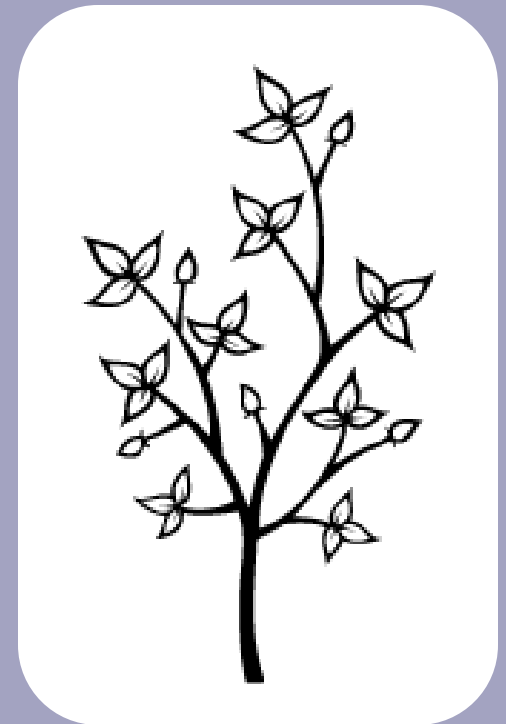
The state shall see to it that natural resources are used economically and natural wealth is protected.



Knowledge

Czech Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms:

- Right to free health care
- Right to favorable environmental quality, and timely & complete info about environmental quality



Power

- Who defines relevant or valid information?
- Who controls media communication about information?
- Who makes decisions about taking risky action?



Trust

- How can people believe information from different sources?
- Do people have faith in institutions to...
 - Inform them
 - Represent their interests
 - Make decisions & take action that protect them



End of Part 2

Continue to Part 3.



Citations Used in This Lecture

Beck, Ulrich. 1992. *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. London: Sage.