

Environment, Health and Social Conflict:

**The Democratic Potential of Contested
Science**

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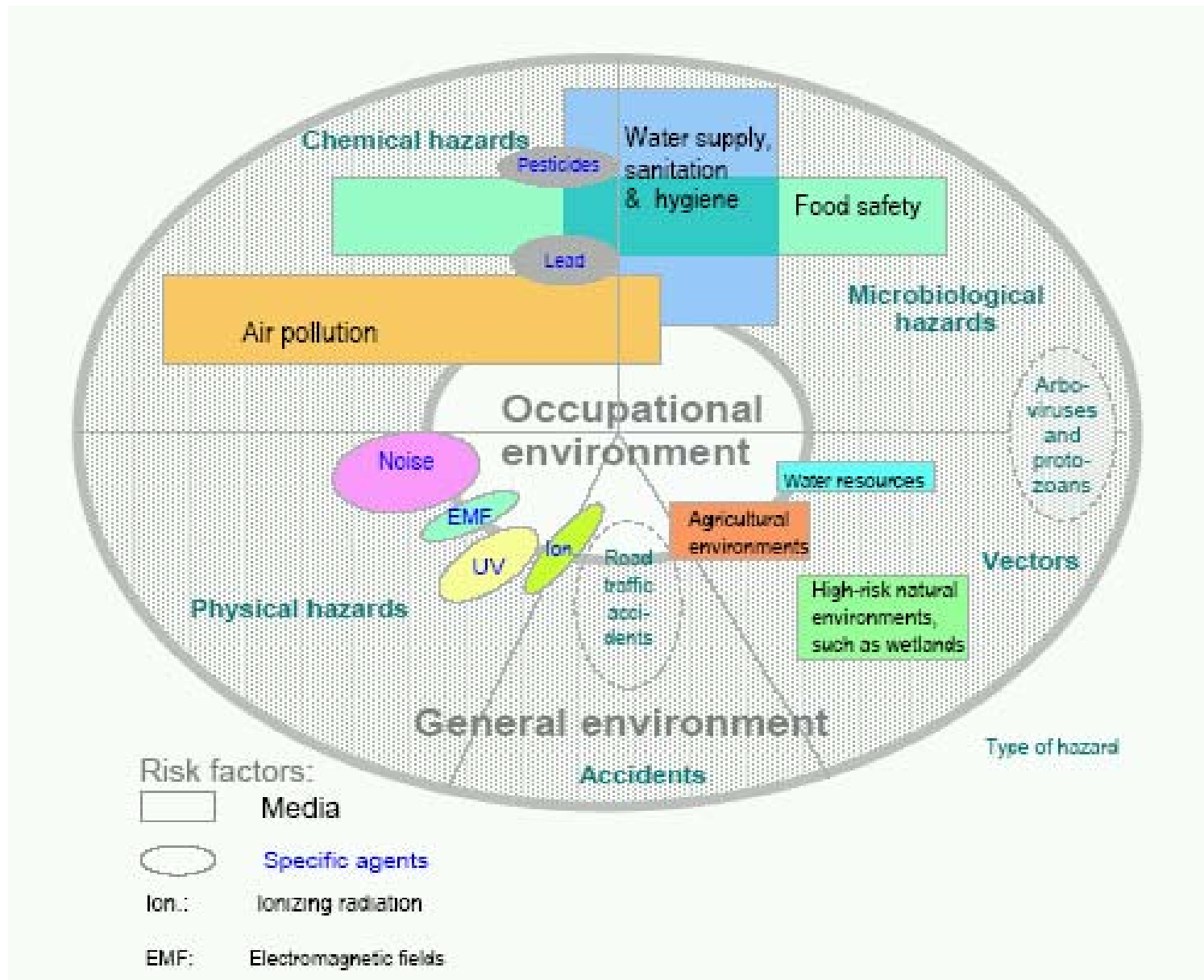
Objectives

- Describe the historical roots of environmental health policy in Israel
- Analyze the development of the relationship among the actors involved in environmental health policy making in Israel
- Compare two important recent environmental health disputes: Kishon River affair, Ramat Hovav industrial zone

Risk Society

- social theory which describes the production and management of risks in modern society
- not intended to imply an increase of risk in society, but rather a society that is organized in response to risks.
- modern society is exposed to a particular type of risk that is the result of the modernization process itself, altering social organization
- Contested science
- Potential for reflexive modernization (precautionary principle, sustainability)

Environmental causes of disease



Environmental health and Social Justice

- in recent decades there is growing interest by communities, scientists and policy makers in the connections between environmental justice and racial/ethnic health disparities.
- Environmental risks are not randomly distributed in the population, they are correlated to income.
- Ethnic minorities also suffer disproportionate environmental risks.



Statistics (2005)

- Total population: [6,725,000](#)
- Gross national income per capita (PPP international \$): [25,280](#)
- Life expectancy at birth m/f (years): [78/82](#)
- Total expenditure on health per capita (Intl \$, 2004): [1,972](#)
- Total expenditure on health as % of GDP (2004): [8.7](#)

Historical Roots of Environmental Health in Israel

- Zionism and health (Herzl's *Altneuland*, Malaria ethos)
- Strong belief in science and technology to solve social problems
- Most major polluting industries owned by the government
- Ministry of Health vs. Ministry of Environment
- Immigration country
- Israel-Arab conflict

Recent environmental health disputes

1. The Kishon River affair: former Israel Navy commandos who had dived in the polluted river for years claimed to suffer from higher rates of cancer → establishment of a Committee headed by former Supreme Court Head, Meir Shamgar
2. Ramat Hovav industrial zone: Bedouins the main population influenced, recently debate over transfer of military bases

- "The Bedouins living in existing Bedouin towns enjoy the same services provided to all Israeli citizens, some of which are adapted especially to their needs."
- "The existing towns can accommodate most of the needs of the Bedouin population."

Israel State Report to UN CERD

- "The physical situation of the towns, in respect to infrastructures, is low and suffers from continuous neglect...the towns are not attractive and will not encourage populating to move into the new planned towns... the lack of local authority in the unrecognized villages is seriously hurting the allocation of budgets and services to the villages. "

Mr. David Cohen, District Head, Ministry of Interior

Current Problems in Israel

- All levels
 - Governmental
 - Academia
 - Research
 - Training and teaching (marginalized in medical and public health schools)
 - Industry
 - NGOs
- Lack of strategic planning on the national level in Israel

Environmental activists and public health

- Maturation of the movement – entering social justice, ethnic and SES sensitivity
- Cooperation with public health practitioners
 - working groups, Clean Air Act, Health Impact Assessment
- Toward a National Environmental Health Action Plan?