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Finally, those friends who have helped me in this - by discussion or distraction - I will thank personally.
Abstract

The main argument of this thesis is that the social impacts of new developments are socially constructed. Rather than simply being affected by impacts local people are active in constructing them.

The thesis begins by providing an overview of the literature on social impacts and their assessment, before moving on to outline what is meant by social constructionism and some of the major debates about the approach. The application of a social constructionist approach to environmental issues has been criticised by sociologists adopting a more realist stance, on the grounds that it ignores the reality of environmental problems and has little practical use. This realist critique is shown to be mistaken in several ways.

Two case studies were conducted to explore how social impacts are socially constructed. Both focus on the impacts of roads; one study was of an area where a new road was proposed and the other where a road had been recently constructed. In both case studies a variety of data were collected. These data are analyzed to illustrate aspects of local people’s construction of the impacts of the road. Analysis explores issues such as why any protest about impacts emerged and why it focused on particular issues. The rhetorical strategies employed to construct impacts as real and serious are also examined. Particular attention is paid to the role of identity in the construction of impacts. Participants are shown to work to characterise themselves as ordinary people, as local people and as different from the 'experts' in order to make robust claims about impact.
Chapter 1

An Introduction to Social Impact Assessment

This first chapter provides an introduction to Social Impact Assessment (SIA). The basic methodology of SIA is outlined, and some of the key issues and debates about how it should proceed are reviewed.

The practice of impact assessment was established in the United States in 1969 with the passing of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NEPA requires that Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) must be prepared for any government projects which would significantly affect the quality of the human environment, and stipulates that the preparation of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) should be an interdisciplinary process including contributions from social scientists as well as from natural scientists and engineers (Freudenberg and Keating 1985). The Council on Environmental Quality's (1986) Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act elaborates on NEPA’s requirements. These regulations interpret the term 'human environment' as including 'the natural and physical environment and the relationship of people with that environment'. Among the effects listed as subjects for assessment are 'aesthetic, historic, cultural, economic, social and health effects'. However the regulations provide little guidance about what exactly should be considered within these categories or how social impacts should be assessed. Vanclay and Bronstein write that SIA emerged as a distinct field a few years after the passing of NEPA 'largely because of the perceived deficiencies of NEPA to respond fully to social impacts' (1995:xi).

Since the passing in 1985 of the European Community Directive on the assessment of the effects of certain projects on the environment, more formal attention is being paid throughout Europe to the effects of new developments. The directive divides projects into Schedule 1 projects for which the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is compulsory, these are major developments such as the construction of motorways, waste
disposal installations and power stations; and Schedule 2 projects for which an EIS has to be prepared if they will have 'significant effects on the environment'. In Britain the assessment of the environmental effects of proposed developments has been an integral part of the planning system since the passing of the Town and Country Planning Act in 1947. The EC Directive has been implemented through statutory regulations of the Town and Country Planning Acts and has not changed the existing procedures significantly (Gilpin 1995).

Wood (1995) claims that the EC Directive is only concerned with the physical environment and 'eschews consideration of social and economic impacts' (1995:88). However it is possible to interpret the wording of the Directive quite differently:

the environmental impact assessment will identify, describe and assess in an appropriate manner, in the light of each individual case...the direct and indirect effects of a project on the following factors:

- human beings, fauna and flora
- soil, water, air, climate and the landscape
- the interaction between the factors mentioned in the first and second indents
- material assets and the cultural heritage

(85/337/EEC Article 3).

The references here to assessment of the effects of projects on human beings, and on material assets and cultural heritage, can easily be read as pointing to the importance of considering social and economic impacts. Thus both NEPA and the EC directive provide scope for a broad interpretation of social impacts, but provide little guidance for their identification or assessment.

Since the implementation of NEPA a considerable literature has emerged dealing specifically with the assessment of social impacts of developments. The bulk of this originates from the US although this situation is slowly changing as legislation requiring the assessment of environmental impacts is passed in other countries. The literature contains general guides for practitioners as well as more academic social scientific research on the theory and practice of social impact assessment. There are numerous definitions of SIA within this literature. The most recent and comprehensive definition is probably that provided in Guidelines and Principles for Social Impact Assessment (1994). This document
was produced by a group of American social scientists who formed the Interorganisational Committee on Guidelines and Principles for SIA in order to publish the first 'systematic inter-disciplinary statement from the social science community as to what should be the content of an SIA' (ibid:1). The Guidelines were intended to help agencies and companies to understand the social consequences of projects, programs and policies and have been referred to as 'the most significant event in recent SIA history' (Burdge & Vanclay 1995:31) as they represent the core body of knowledge about SIA. The definition of SIA contained in the Guidelines is as follows:

we define SIA in terms of efforts to assess or estimate in advance, the social consequences that are likely to follow from specific policy actions (including programs and the adoption of new policies) and specific government actions (including buildings, large projects and leasing large tracts of land for resource extraction) particularly in the context of the U.S. National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. (ibid:1)

Although this definition includes the effects of policies as well as new developments, to date SIA has been used far more extensively for the latter and most of the literature concentrates on how to assess the impacts of new developments. SIA has usually been concerned with the effects of changes such as the building of a new road, power station or dam, and typically concentrates on the local level.

SIA - Science or Politics?

Much of the literature on SIA focuses on issues of methodology (see for instance textbooks by Finsterbusch and Wolf 1977, Carley and Bustelo 1980, Finsterbusch et al 1983, Tester and Mykes 1981). There is a broad consensus about how SIA should be done which follows the model for Environmental Impact Assessment. This involves first providing a description of the existing situation - this stage is often referred to as profiling - then identifying the full range of possible social impacts which may follow from the project and deciding which are most likely and most serious, and finally providing a comparison of the situation with and without the project and possibly comparing the impacts of different schemes.

However there is less agreement about the appropriate research methods to be used at each stage or the sort of data necessary to provide reliable predictions of future impact. These
differences largely stem from alternative perspectives on the role and aims of SIA. On one hand are those who regard it as essentially a scientific enterprise, and on the other those who emphasise its political character. Carley (1983) makes a similar distinction between what he refer to as the numeric and participatory approaches. This distinction is an ideal type, many discussions of how SIA should proceed contain elements of both positions. However it is a useful model for introducing some of the key issues and debates in the field.

SIA as Objective Science

The NEPA Regulations require information on impacts, not judgements or decisions about the best course of action. Within this model SIA's role is conceptualised as a decision tool providing information on the full range of benefits and disbenefits of a proposed action for decision makers who are left with the responsibility of making the final decision (e.g. Finsterbusch 1980, Freudenberg and Keating 1985). Meidinger and Schnaiberg (1980) describe SIA as an attempt to 'scientize' public policy by providing rigorous information about possible project outcomes. This emphasis on producing 'facts' for decision makers is seen to lead to a preference for quantitative data. Loseke writes:

Formally, the purpose of measuring program impact is to allow policy makers to engage in 'rational decision making' and it seems that popular assumptions equating rational with 'scientific', and 'scientific' with 'precise measurement' favour quantitative data...in brief when policy makers' preferences direct research, a narrow range of methodologies and data are favoured (1989:203).

The use of quantitative methods provides the SIA with the appearance of objectivity and presents social impacts in a form in which they can be more readily compared with other impacts. Freudenberg and Keating (1985) explain that so long as quantitative and economic methods are employed in SIA the task can be relatively straightforward. The assessors are using techniques which are well developed, dealing with factors that are easily translated into monetary terms, and providing decision makers with results that are easily understood and clearly relevant.

This preference for quantitative data can lead to a concentration on some categories of impact at the expense of others. A distinction is sometimes made between 'objective' and 'subjective' impacts. For instance Dietz writes:
Subjective impacts are those perceived by, or of concern to, those affected, whether or not an outsider finds those concerns realistic. Objective impacts are those considered important by an outside expert whether or not those impacts are of concern to those affected (1987:56).

Gold (1978) explores the close connection between the notion of 'objective' and 'subjective' impacts and 'objective' and 'subjective' data and methods of analysis. He argues that data which are analyzed quantitatively is deemed to be 'objective', while qualitative analyses are considered merely 'subjective'(1978:11). He points out that this differentiation between 'objective' and 'subjective' data is essentially a status distinction, with 'objective' data being considered superior. This prioritising leads some to argue that even if data are being collected on 'subjective' impacts (for example on local people's perceptions, attitudes and fears) every attempt should be made to produce 'objective' data. For instance Finsterbusch writes that:

It is easy to criticise efforts to quantify the non-quantifiable...Nevertheless, impacts that are not quantified, and quantified impacts that are not translated into monetary terms, are slighted by decision makers. To make impacts count in assessments, they must be quantified and priced. (1985:213)

Obviously some impacts are easier to quantify and price than others, for instance it is easier to cost a reduction in property values due to the proximity of a new road (although even this is likely to be speculative), than it is to cost the psychological trauma of those forced to move out of their homes to make way for the road. The priority given to quantitative data has been criticised as leading to a situation where only those impacts that can be easily quantified are included and many other important effects ignored (Rohe 1982, Carley 1986). Reviews of published EISs in both the US and the UK reveal that the only social impact considered in any detail in many statements is the project’s economic impact (see Friesema and Culhane 1976, Jobes 1985, Freudenberg and Keating 1982 and 1985). Freudenberg and Keating (1982) noted that most studies to date had focused on economic and technical considerations, often to the exclusion of other likely impacts, in particular the social impacts. They substantiate this claim by referring to a review of impact statements carried out by Wilke and Cain (1977) which revealed that the majority of statements showed no evidence of social research techniques aimed at discovering the likely effects of projects on local people. Indeed only eleven of the eighty statements that Wilke and
Cain reviewed used surveys, interviews, documentary analysis, unobtrusive observation or case histories. Freudenberg and Keating concluded that 'most social impact assessments have very little to do with the ways in which human beings are reacting to the changes being wrought'(1982:72). Glasson and Heaney’s (1993) review of a sample of UK EISs reveals that the situation in the UK is broadly similar. Of the 43% of their sample which had considered any social or economic impacts the focus was more on the economic than on social impacts. Where social impacts were considered these tended to be restricted to such things as the impact of the development on local services and impacts on accommodation.

Including Local People’s Perspectives in SIA: an Alternative Model.

An alternative model for SIA is one which regards the struggle for 'objectivity' and neutrality as doomed to failure, and argues for a recognition of the inevitably political and value laden nature of the process. For example Torgerson (1981) criticises the tendency to adopt an elitist or technocratic approach to the study of social impacts in which assessors assume the role of experts engaged in detached scientific enquiry. He proposes an alternative perspective which acknowledges that SIA is a social phenomenon, inevitably informed by political commitments and having political implications. Consequently he argues that SIA cannot be regarded as a science 'in the conventional sense of the word' (1981:85). Carley argues similarly that 'the distinctive character of socio-political relations renders a quasi-natural science approach inappropriate'(1986:13) and advocates an approach which acknowledges the centrality of values, both of those doing the assessing and of those who will be affected by impacts.

Those adopting this perspective are critical of the reliance on quantitative analysis characteristic of much SIA. Torgerson (op cit p71) criticises the 'profligate use of numerical notation, mathematical signs and formulas, complicated charts and diagrams' as creating a sense of confidence which is at odds with what he calls the 'intangible and intuitive dimensions' of social impact. Dale (1981) supports Torgerson’s critique of the use of quantification arguing that 'the apparent certainty conveyed by checklists and matrices....may not reflect the relevant social issues (1981:47), however he takes issue with the labelling of impacts that are not easily quantified as intangibles. He suggests that this
inadvertently contributes to their continued dismissal:

Many social and environmental values are referred to as 'intangibles' as if there was something vague or insubstantial about loss of one's community life, self reliance or sense of place. This is misleading (1981:47)

Carley (1983) argues that some information cannot be quantified and argues for an end to the practice of what he calls 'pseudo-quantification' of such data. In place of such misplaced quantification a greater use of qualitative, ethnographic research methods is recommended. Those taking this position argue that qualitative methods should not be seen as less reliable or important than quantitative methods, and often have a greater chance of addressing the complexity of the issues and of providing a more sophisticated understanding of the social dynamics of the situation.

The use of qualitative methods involves more contact and communication with those likely to be involved than in what Torgerson calls the 'technocratic' model. Emphasis is placed on the importance of understanding local people's perceptions and expectations of impact rather than leaving the task of identifying and assessing impacts to a supposedly neutral assessor. Gold (1978) writes that the central question addressed in an SIA must be the difference that the proposed development will make in the lives of local residents, and that this must be addressed first and foremost from the point of view of local residents.

Gaining access to the understandings and perceptions of those who will bear the impacts is recommended for two rather different reasons. First is the belief that unless this information is available assessments will be incomplete or incorrect, and secondly there is often a political commitment to enabling public participation in the decision making process.

Jessen provides a good example of the first rationale when he argues that:

professionals who use only the narrow, specialist training of sterile quantitative methods, without taking into consideration the qualitative aspects and the broader understanding and insights of citizens regarding their world view in their own situation or complexes, cannot adequately define the problem (1980:243)

Freudenberg and Olsen similarly draw attention to the importance of the insights of local people:
Local residents have an obvious contribution to offer such an assessment because they are particularly important 'experts' on themselves (1983:70).

Taking into account the attitudes of the public may be expected to yield pay-offs for planners. Local people have important knowledge about their locality which can inform the design of more acceptable and workable developments (Cooper 1981, Armour et al 1977). In addition as Rohe notes:

Community attitudes toward a project may be as important in determining the impact of a project as ... economic or demographic changes' (1982:374).

For instance, when new road schemes are planned, underpasses are often included in the plans to prevent people on one side of the road becoming isolated from amenities and people on the other side. However, if people are fearful of using underpasses, and this fear prevents them from crossing the road by this method, then the inclusion of underpasses in the scheme does not fulfil the purpose for which they were designed. Thus the importance of understanding the meanings local people attach to new developments is also emphasised.

Disanto et al explicitly adopt a symbolic-interactionist perspective and point out that:

Responses are not made directly to the actions of others but instead are based on the meanings which they attach to such actions (1981:29).

The notion is that by taking into account the attitudes of local people, planners can ensure that their plans are acceptable locally.

Seen in this light public participation is essentially a means to an end - a way of ensuring that all relevant variables are included in the analysis. However public participation is often advocated not simply to improve the data but because of a political commitment to 'democratise' (Dale 1981) or increase levels of participation in the decision making process. Armour et al end a long list of reasons for increasing public involvement with the assertion that:

those affected by a proposal have a right to contribute to its assessment (1977:29)

The incentive to include local people in the process is strengthened by a general pressure from the public for more meaningful participation. Planners recognise that unless people feel that they have been adequately consulted and their views represented, the planning process will be more conflictual, time consuming and costly. SIA is seen as a tool for
achieving political ends (democratisation) rather than simply as a detached fact finding enterprise. Rohe talks about the potential of SIA for empowering people 'enabling them to enter the political arena with a more highly developed understanding of project consequences' (p370).

Alongside the emphasis on public participation is a concern to ensure social equity. Freudenberg and Olsen (1983) draw attention to the danger that encouraging public participation may serve to strengthen the position of those members of the public already best equipped to defend their interests. Research has demonstrated that it is the most eloquent, educated and privileged members of communities who take up the opportunity to participate and have the resources to do so effectively (see p92 for a fuller discussion of this point) Rather than abandoning the emphasis on participation they make a plea for its careful use, and for attention to equity issues:

It is vital...that public participation programs be employed carefully - that they are used, but not abused - or else we run the risk that our presumably laudable efforts will actually serve to make an already inequitable situation even worse. (p78)

In advocating public participation in the process of SIA most authors recognise that 'The Public' are not a homogenous group, and that within any locality there are many different 'publics' who will have different perspectives on the proposed project and are likely to experience impacts differently. Wolf writes that:

conceptual analysis and elaboration of categories such as 'community cohesion' is a pressing need. The tacit assumption is one of a consensus model whereas community conflict is often the situation of fact (1974:25),

and Dunning states that:

The public can be separated into numerous publics and interest groups occupying different positions on the social scale and having different needs and goals (1974:60).

Wolf concludes that the 'bottom line question for SIA is who benefits and who loses' (1983:15) and Rohe describes SIA as providing a 'mechanism for assessing social equity' (1982:369). The Guidelines and principles for Social Impact Assessment (1994) illustrate that concern about equity issues is now considered to be of central importance to SIA. These guidelines suggest that SIAs should pay particular attention to those groups
which are likely to be affected most seriously by a project, drawing a rather shaky parallel with the emphasis given in the biological sections of EISs to particularly endangered or threatened plant and wildlife species.

As mentioned above these two models of SIA - as objective science or as a participatory process - are ideal types which serve to illustrate some of the debates and tensions in the field. A number of papers have been published which deal with these tensions explicitly. For instance Freudenberg (1989) and Freudenberg and Keating (1985) discuss the difficulty that SIA practitioners often experience in aiming to collect data in a neutral and unbiased way while at the same time recognising that there is no neutral information about impacts, with different groups and individuals having different perspectives on and different exposure to impacts. They suggest that the best way forward is to recognise explicitly the adversarial nature of the process of identifying and assessing impacts by ensuring that all parties are equally represented. At present the usual procedure is for the SIA to be commissioned by the developers and attempt to consider the views of all groups in the community. Freudenberg and Keating suggest an alternative model where a number of social scientists are involved in the process each representing different interests in the community. They argue:

Somewhat ironically, it appears one way to strengthen the scientific component... is for at least some social scientists to embrace the adversarial aspects of the role more fully. Social scientists... may actually be able to do more to advance the scientific quality of SIAs by taking on adversarial roles than by attempting to adhere...to the traditional scientific model. (1985:600)

Dietz (1987) also explicitly addresses the relationship between science and politics in the process of SIA. He follows Habermas in arguing for the desirability of greater public participation in discussions of political and policy issues. He outlines Habermas’ models of the ways in which the relationship between science and politics in the process can be dealt with. First is the decisionistic approach which subordinates science to politics, the second model is the technocratic model in which politics is subordinated to technical analyses, while Habermas’ preferred model is a pragmatistic one where discussion by an informed public integrates values and scientific information. Dietz sees this as the ideal model for SIA and advocates setting up panels of experts and ordinary people who together conduct the SIA considering both 'subjective' and 'objective' impacts.
Theory and Practice

Social Impact Assessment is a practice, and as such is perhaps more influenced by features of the context in which it is conducted than by the writing of social scientists about how it should proceed.

As mentioned above when an SIA of a new development is conducted it is usually as part of a more extensive EIA carried out or commissioned by the developers. Those who commission assessments of social impacts are likely to be engineers who often have had no previous contact with social science, and may even be hostile to it (Freudenberg & Keating 1985). Their expectations and demands of SIA may differ substantially from what a social scientist would consider appropriate, yet as a commissioned consultant the social scientist's ability to influence the research design may be limited. Developers are likely to want the SIA to be done as quickly and cheaply as possible and to provide easily understandable results. They are unlikely to be interested in, or know how to make sense of, more sophisticated sociological analyses of the situation.

In addition they may well be wary of including public participation in the process in any meaningful way, fearing that it will prove expensive and make the process more lengthy and difficult. Serious commitment to public participation involves a readiness to relinquish control over the assessment and decision making process, something which developers may well resist. As Rohe (1981) points out it also enables potential opponents of the proposed development to protest more effectively, again something which the developers may well prefer to avoid.

It is perhaps these factors, more than a carefully thought out commitment to the primacy of quantitative analyses, that lead to SIAs relying on economic analyses, being largely uniformed by sociological theory and showing little evidence of the use of social research methods (see Dietz 1981, Freudenberg & Keating 1982, Friesema and Culhane 1976, Wilke and Cain 1977).

SIA: The Current Situation

In a recent review of SIA Finsterbusch (1994) outlines changes in the rate of production
and nature of SIAs in the US. He writes that during the 1970s over 1000 EISs were produced a year, many of which had SIA components, but that since 1980 their production has declined greatly with 352 EISs produced in 1980 and just 189 in 1993. This decline is linked to the fact that during the 1980s few new major roads, dams or energy facilities were constructed. The siting of waste facilities was one area in which EISs were required in the 1980s, however due to what Finsterbusch calls 'political factors' (ibid:7) sites were often eliminated after identification and the EISs' cancelled before completion (see p160 for a discussion of the difficulty of siting waste disposal facilities). However in the US alongside this decline of SIAs dealing with local siting issues, new areas for its application have emerged. The number of EISs commissioned for land and resource use management plans have increased since the 1980s, and there is an increasing demand for impact assessments of large scale development projects in developing countries. A shift is also taking place away from a focus on the local impacts of discrete projects to a greater concern with cumulative impact assessment (considering the effects of more than one development on a locality) and strategic impact assessment (considering the impacts of programmes and policies rather than individual projects). Thus although the character of SIA in the US has changed since its inception in the 1970s, it remains an area of thriving intellectual and practical concern.

Moreover as Finsterbusch (ibid) notes, as the practice of SIA has declined in the US, interest in the practice has grown in other countries. In the UK calls are being made for the systematic consideration of social impacts within EIAs. For instance Bond (1995) notes that there is insufficient experience in carrying out SIA in the UK and that this needs to be remedied as a consideration of social and economic impacts is integral to a complete environmental impact assessment. Glasson and Heaney (1993) also note that to date social impacts have received little consideration in British EISs and regard this situation as unsatisfactory. In a review of 110 randomly selected environmental impact statements produced between 1988 and 1991 they found that fewer than half of these had addressed any social or economic impacts, and of those that had the consideration was usually cursory and of low quality. They argue that

Socio-economic impacts merit a higher profile; they are of relevance to the impacts of most major projects. (p343)
The need for SIA is also being recognised in other European countries. For instance Juslen (1995) writes of growing interest in Finland since the passing of EIA legislation in September 1994.

While there is now a substantial literature on SIA, coherent documents such as the *Guidelines and Principles for Social Impact Assessment* which outline methods and procedures for conducting assessments, and widespread recognition of the importance of integrating the consideration of social impacts into EIA, it seems that in practice SIA has little status within planning decisions. Burdge and Vanclay concede that:

> The fact remains that in the two decades since SIA became a recognised subfield of research and policy application, there are few examples where its use has made a difference in the project/policy decision process...SIA is recognised as important but has yet to be integrated sufficiently in the EIA process. (1995:37)

In his review of examples of SIA within Finland Juslen reaches the same conclusion:

> at present impact assessment results seldom make a difference in decision making. (1995:170)

In the UK interest in SIA is just beginning to emerge (see papers by Glasson & Heaney 1993, and Bond 1995). The experience of the US suggests that its integration into the planning process will be a lengthy and difficult process. However as the siting of new developments such as roads becomes increasingly difficult due to the extent of public protest about impacts, the time is right for greater consideration of the potential of SIA.
Chapter 2

Social Impacts and Social Constructionism

In this chapter I move on from the general discussion of SIA of the last chapter to consider the whole notion of 'social impact', and argue that theory of the process of impact is underdeveloped. Spector and Kitsuse's (1987) observations on the construction of social problems are then applied to the sphere of social impacts, with the suggestion that this social constructionist approach has the potential to provide fresh insights into the process of social impact. Social Constructionism is a term which is often used without clarification of its meaning. The final section of the chapter provides an introduction to some of the key debates within social constructionism, and outlines the constructionist stance which will be adopted throughout the rest of the thesis.

What are Social Impacts Anyway?

Although there are numerous definitions of SIA in the literature and, as illustrated in Chapter 1, lengthy discussions about how it should proceed, there is surprisingly little attention paid to the question of what social impacts actually are. Definitions of social impact are few and far between, and where they do exist often do not consider social impact separately from its assessment. This results in some rather unedifying definitions; for instance Wolf (1983) states that 'what one does in SIA is to assess the social impacts' (p16), and Porter et al (1980) define social impacts as those which sociologists, psychologists and anthropologists assess. When attempts are made to spell out what is meant by social impact, definitions are typically short and state simply that impacts are effects or changes on some aspects of social life, brought about by a project. A selection of such definitions are provided below:

(SIA assesses) social effects of changes in the physical environment. (Rohe 1981:369)

A Social Impact Assessment is (1) an analysis of past and present impingements upon local social conditions and processes and (2) a projection of proposed interventions upon these aspects of life. (Gold 1978:107)
In a nutshell impacts include the indirect as well as the direct effects of a proposed action...the impacts, in short, include the full range of significant consequences of the action - the effects or changes that take place because of the action and that would not have occurred otherwise. (Freudenberg 1989:135)

Social assessment (is)... a process used to anticipate and manage social change arising from policies and projects. (Taylor et al 1990:43)

One problem that is acknowledged about these definitions is the difficulty of knowing which effects or changes are 'significant' enough to merit assessment (Meidinger and Schnaiberg,1980). This is a problem which applies to EIA as a whole; Malcolm (1994) criticises the EC directive's advice that projects which will have a 'significant effect' upon the environment should be subject to EIA pointing out that whether a project will have a 'significant impact' often cannot be known in advance. Gilpin (1995) also notes that the directive provides no definition of what constitutes a significant impact, and argues that the concept of significance is inevitably subjective, and likely to be defined by those responsible for carrying out the assessment.

While clear definitions of social impact are rare, extensive examples of the sort of changes that should be considered in an SIA are often provided. For instance Finsterbusch (1977) categorises impacts into those on individual quality of life, those on organisations and those on communities, then further subdivides each category. The Guidelines and Principles for Social Impact Assessment (1994) provides a much more elaborate categorisation dividing impacts under the headings of population characteristics, community and institutional structure, political and social resources, individual and family changes, community resources and then listing variables to be considered under each heading. It advises that each variable should be considered at the different stages of a project's life - planning, implementation, operation, decommissioning. However, regardless of the extent of the list, providing examples of impacts likely to be significant still does not constitute a definition of social impact.

In his discussion of EIA Gilpin problematizes the term 'impact', pointing out that:

it is difficult to think of an impact as being anything but a sharp blow.(1995:5)

and suggests that this does not fit well with the way in which environmental changes
actually come about or are experienced. He does not however carry this criticism through, but sticks with the term 'impact' as it has acquired such wide usage. A review of the SIA literature reveals that this sort of definition of impact is implicit in much of it, and explicitly stated in some of it. It is assumed that social impacts result in a direct and mechanistic way from changes in the physical environment. This assumption is stated clearly in the book by Taylor et al., who write:

It can be suggested that changes in the social-cultural system automatically follow from bio-physical alteration. (1990:51)

Kroll-Smith and Couch make the same point:

technological degradation of the biosphere sets in motion organisational activities and psychological processes that frequently result in personal, social and cultural change. (1991:293)

This model of the relationship between environmental and social change is informed by the ideas of Environmental Sociologists such as Catton and Dunlap (1978, 1980) who argue that sociologists should consider the interaction between social and environmental variables, and draw attention to the way in which changes in one sphere result in changes in the other (for a fuller discussion of their work see p36-39). Proponents of this sort of Environmental Sociology argue that this approach is based on an ecological worldview which emphasises the interconnected nature of all aspects of life. However its origins can also be clearly traced to functional sociology which shares an emphasis on the interdependence of functional units. Functionalist approaches pervade much SIA although are rarely explicitly presented as such (Disanto 1981). For instance the methodology outlined by Olsen et al (1981) requires the assessor to identify 'community goals' and predict 'community structure changes' as a result of the development, and that presented by Flynn et al (1983) involves identifying 'principal functional groups in the community' and their 'interaction patterns'. Disanto suggest that this functionalist orientation predominates as it is similar to systems approaches familiar to the scientists or engineers who commission assessments. As a result it is easier for them to understand and accept than other sociological approaches.

In viewing the community as a system made up of 'functional units' connected by 'interaction patterns' social impact can be conceptualised in a mechanistic fashion. The assumption is that the community 'functions' until something 'impacts' upon it. The task
of the impact assessor is to predict how the impact will change or damage the functioning of the community and suggest ways of preserving its smooth functioning.

The functional model of social impact implies a particular model of the relationship between environment and society. The 'environment' is conceptualised as outside of, or separate from, society or the community. Although the two things are described as interdependent and interactive with each other, they are clearly depicted as separate realms. The social structure or system changes in response to changes in the physical environment which surrounds it. This conceptualisation of the relationship between the environmental and social spheres is implicit in the SIA literature; it is surprisingly hard to find any overt consideration of the relationship or distinction between environmental and social impacts. The assumption seems to be that the distinction between 'people impacts' (Wolf 1983) and bio-physical effects is self-evident. There are several problems with this assumption of a clear distinction between social and environmental impacts.

First, the assigning of the social and the environmental to separate spheres which impact upon each other presents a model of social change which neglects the role of human agency, meaning and interpretation. Social change is envisaged as a simple response to an outside stimulus. Some of those writing in the field recognise this implicit assumption and draw attention to its inadequacy. Disanto et al argue for the introduction of a symbolic interactionist perspective to SIA which recognises that human beings are not:

merely organisms with some degree of organisation who respond to forces which impinge upon them. (1981:30)

but instead are:

individuals or actors with selves...(who) act by making indications to themselves of things in their surroundings which thus provide a guide to their actions. (ibid)

Secondly, such a distinction is hard to maintain on the basis of NEPA or the EC directive's recommendations. Both present a definition of environmental impact which is profoundly anthropocentric - the environmental effects to be considered are those which affect some aspect of human life either directly or indirectly. The environment is not considered to have an intrinsic value but deserves protection to the extent that its preservation is essential.
for human wellbeing. From this position there can be no environmental impacts which are not in some sense social impacts - whether they affect health, deplete resources, pollute the air, water or earth or change the appearance of a landscape, environmental changes affect individuals and groups in society. Thus it becomes hard to maintain the idea of a natural distinction between social and environmental impacts.

In addition the social impacts of a new development may well be defined to include issues of concern to the local population. The impacts which people are prepared to protest about and seek to avoid are often not only those which affect their lives in a direct way. For instance in the recent protest against the building of the Newbury bypass in the UK (see p68-69 for a discussion of recent road protests) much of the action was oriented towards protecting trees. Although of course it can be argued that the presence of trees is important to people for aesthetic and perhaps recreational purposes, part of the rationale was that the trees themselves had intrinsic value. Cutting down trees may not appear to have a direct social impact however it was an issue which generated considerable opposition and consequently problems for the developers. In addition it was an issue around which groups formed and divisions within the local community developed - thus it has an ongoing social impact in the traditional sense of the term. For planners and developers part of the rationale for SIA is to anticipate likely areas of concern amongst the local populace and so to exclude environmental concern is likely to be counterproductive.

It is not that a distinction between social and environmental impacts cannot be made, but that the distinction is not obvious or natural. Making a distinction between the two is an analytic or definitional act. Spector and Kitsuse make a similar point in a critique of the common assumption that 'physical conditions' such as earthquakes and floods do not qualify as social problems. They argue that:

A flood is not a physical condition, but rather a condition that is defined as physical, rather than for example, social or technological. Physical is a meaning that we attach to a condition, and as such, a meaning that might shift and change (1987:46)

Similarly to describe some impacts as social and others as environmental is to impose a categorisation or judgement, the distinction is not given.
This treatment of social impact: a lack of a clear definition, provision of lists of social impacts which have little in common, a lack of theory of the process of impact, and a functionalist orientation to social change, echoes almost exactly Spector and Kitsuse's (1987) criticism of the field of social problems research. Their book *Constructing Social Problems* opens with the assertion that:

> There is no adequate definition of social problems within sociology and there is not and never has been a sociology of social problems. (1987:1)

They question what is gained by listing a diverse range of things such as drug addiction, racism, divorce, pollution, war and community disorganisation as examples of social problems, arguing that such things have little in common to justify their grouping in the same category of 'social problems'. The parallels with SIA are striking both in the lack of a definition of the subject matter and in the assumption that an extensive list of social phenomena can be classified together as 'social impacts'. Spector and Kitsuse go on to outline the functionalist orientation of much previous work on social problems which involves identifying conditions or behaviours that 'impede the fulfilment of society’s goals, that interfere with the smooth functioning of society, or that throw society into disequilibrium' (ibid:23). They argue that such a functional approach contributes nothing to the study of social problems and it does not provide any clearer insight into their distinctive nature:

> even if the functional formulation were taken seriously and rigorously applied to empirical research, it would not produce a sociology of social problems, but only a sociology of social disorganisation, an explanation of social conditions, but not of social problems. (ibid:39)

They suggest that a sociology of social problems should be concerned with the organisation of activities and claims about social problems, rather than with the causes of or solutions to the problems themselves. Analysis focuses on how a particular condition comes to be identified as a social problem at a particular time, how that problem is defined and what solutions are considered desirable.

In the following section the social constructionist approach is outlined in greater detail, and finally recommended as a promising direction for sociologists interested in the impacts of new developments.
An Introduction to Social Constructionism

This section provides an introduction to social constructionism, focusing on some of the key divisions and debates within the approach. As debates about social constructionism have been most thoroughly developed within the field of the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge (SSK), it is necessary to consider some of this work. However it should be emphasised that the intention here is simply to introduce some of the key debates rather than to provide a complete review of the use of social constructionism in SSK.

The term 'social construction' is widely used within the social sciences. Velody talks of the 'ever growing spread of the theme of social construction' (1994:81) and Fuller writes that: researchers in virtually every branch of the human sciences are currently 'applying' constructivist principles and insights to a host of topics. (1994:87)

However it is often unclear exactly what is meant by the term:

'social construction' and 'construction' do not generally mean the same thing from one author to another, and even within the same work the terms are meant to draw our attention to several quite different types of phenomena. (Sismondo 1993:515)

While social constructionism has become a key term in sociological analysis, just what it signifies remains an open question, and a clear formulation of its general usage, and indeed of its lineage, has yet to be written. (Velody 1994:82)

Additional confusion is generated by the fact that some authors use the term 'social constructionism' while others favour 'social constructivism' or simply 'constructionism' or 'constructivism' without providing a rationale for their chosen terminology.1

In a recent review of social constructionism Sarbin and Kitsuse (1994) trace the approach's roots to the works of Schutz (1967) and Berger and Luckmann (1967), social interactionism, the work of Goffman and ethnmethodology. As a consequence of this diverse heritage many different types of analysis are presented under the guise of social constructionism. What these analyses share is their questioning or rejection of realist approaches which take as given the reality or 'out-there-ness' of events, conditions and

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1 At a recent conference on social constructionism (Constructing the Social, University of Durham, April 1994) discussion about the various terms revealed no clear rationale for preferring one term over another.
institutions. By contrast social constructionist approaches draw attention to the ways in which these things are constructed through social action and interaction. Sarbin and Kitsuse write that central to the approach is the conviction that:

Social objects are not given 'in the world' but are constructed, negotiated, reformed, fashioned and organised by human beings in their efforts to makes sense of happenings in the world. (1994:3)

The approach has been developed most notably within the fields of SSK and the sociology of social problems. These fields have largely developed separately from each other, with the work on science paying more attention to issues of epistemology and ontology while the social problems field has been characterised more by case studies of particular social problems.

Within SSK social constructionist studies emerged as a response to the recommendations of the 'Strong Programme' formulated by Bloor (1976). Woolgar (1988) outlines the four key principles of the approach; causality, impartiality, symmetry and reflexivity. The principle of causality states that the aim of SSK is to discern the conditions which bring about beliefs or states of knowledge, while the principle of impartiality recommends that the beliefs or knowledge which are chosen for study should not be selected on the basis of their perceived truth, rationality or success. The principle of symmetry proposes that regardless of whether the knowledge studied is characterised as 'true' or 'false', the same sorts of explanation should be used to explain it. Finally the principle of reflexivity recognises that in principle sociological analyses and arguments can be deconstructed and explained in the same way as other scientific knowledge. Lynch (1994) notes that the principle of causality is not entirely accepted within SSK, but that the principles of symmetry and impartiality 'continue to be advocated in all major lines of constructivist...inquiry' (p75).

The implications of the strong programme have led to sustained debate within SSK, and to the development of a variety of approaches all of which might broadly be described as social constructionist. In a review of social constructionism in SSK Sismondo draws a distinction between those adopting a mild constructionist position and those adopting a radical constructionist position. Those he characterises as mild constructionists draw
attention to the social processes that are involved in the development of scientific institutions, epistemologies and knowledges. Sismondo describes such studies as useful and suggests that they are relatively uncontroversial as they consider how social reality is socially constructed:

Institutions are primarily social realities, not material ones, and it is social reality that is socially constructed in Berger and Luckmann’s sense. (1993:522)

These studies retain a distinction between the social and the material world - a position which Sismondo himself adheres to:

the distinction can be drawn roughly along the line of meaningfulness: social objects must be meaningful, whereas material objects are only meaningful when they are incorporated into the social. Meaningfulness might be one way in which we could characterise the difference between the social and the material. (ibid:524)

The work which he describes as radical constructionism denies that such a distinction can easily be drawn between social and material reality, and argues that ‘material stuff’ (ibid:534) can also be taken to be socially constructed. Sismondo illustrates this position particularly by considering the work of Knorr-Cetina, Latour and Woolgar (1986) and Woolgar (1988). Latour and Woolgar make a case for the social construction not just of institutions but of material phenomena and facts themselves:

We do not wish to say that facts do not exist nor that there is no such thing as reality...our point is that ‘out-there-ness’ is the consequence of scientific work rather than its cause. (1986:180)

In *Science the Very Idea* (1988) Woolgar argues against the common sense notion that objects precede representations suggesting instead that representation constitutes or gives rise to the object (1988:65). Sismondo depicts this work as abandoning ‘any commitment to a world of things-in-themselves’(p535). Thus he draws a distinction between mild constructionism which draws attention to the social processes involved in the construction of scientific knowledge and a more radical position which sees world views as actually constructing material objects (p547).

A comparable distinction between forms of constructionism exists within research on social problems. Here the division is characterised as between contextual and strict constructionism (Best 1989). Contextual constructionists are those who maintain a
distinction between what participants believe or claim about social conditions and what is 'in fact' known about the conditions. This position is most clearly exemplified in Best’s work (1989, 1993) in which he makes it clear that contextual constructionists are interested in 'objective conditions' (1993:136-137) and in assessing the relative merit of claims about those conditions. Strict constructionists on the other hand avoid making any assumptions about 'the reality' of conditions and focus entirely on the claims made about them:

The strict constructionist is not interested in assessing or judging the truth, accuracy, credibility or reasonableness of what members say and do. (Schneider and Kitsuse 1989:xii)

At times strict constructionism in social problems research comes close to the radical constructionism of Woolgar et al - for instance Spector and Kitsuse claim that social problems are the activities of those who assert the existence of conditions, rather than being 'actual' conditions (1987:74), and more recently Ibarra and Kitsuse have referred to social problems as 'constituted by claims making activity' (1993:26). However the main thrust of the approach seems to be that the sociologist should not engage with the question of whether the asserted condition actually exists or not, or attempt to asses the validity of the claims being made. Rather the sociologist’s job is to attempt to account for the emergence, organisation and maintenance of claims making activity. There is clear parallel here with the concern of the 'Strong Programme' to account for the conditions which bring about beliefs and to remain agnostic about whether those beliefs are true or false.

Although this distinction between contextual and strict constructionism within social problems research differs from that between mild and radical constructionism in SSK both deal with the relationship between social activities and 'reality'. In SSK the debate is about whether social forces or activities are simply involved in the construction of knowledges or whether they can also be said to construct material reality. Within social problems research debate centres on whether the sociologist accepts that 'the truth' about social conditions can be known, or whether they hold that conditions are not of interest except to the extent that they are said to exist or are talked about by members themselves (Schneider and Kitsuse:xii).

Sismondo notes that within the social studies of science literature the majority of
constructionist studies adopt a mild form of analysis, and even those which espouse radical aims often end up providing a mild analysis (op cit:545). Similarly within social problems research contextual studies are far more common than strict ones (see for instance the collection edited by Sarbin and Kitsuse 1994). In a rare example of a cross-over between SSK and social problems research, Woolgar and Pawluch (1985) observe that the vast majority of constructionist studies of social problems make some assumption about the reality of the condition they are discussing. They tend to claim that the incidence of the 'problem' under investigation has remained stable - whether it is coffee drinking, heroin use or child beating - while claims making activities about the condition have changed.

all these works make claims of their own, the truth value of which is never questioned. (p215)

Elsewhere Woolgar (1983) depicts the social constructionist as being on a 'greasy pole' between realism and relativism - at times sliding towards making realist claims about the nature of a condition, then sliding back to more relativist claims about the alternative ways in which a 'problem' might be constructed.

Woolgar and Pawluch suggest that these 'lapses into realism' can be understood in three ways. First they suggest that they might be read as a 'description for what passes for a successful style of explanation of social problems'(p224). In order to develop a constructionist account of a condition some 'objective' statement about the nature of the condition is necessary so that the claim that definitions and representations of the condition have changed can be strongly made. The second possibility is that this 'ontological gerrymandering' represents a serious failing in constructionist studies, and that more caution in such work is necessary. However their final possible reading of the phenomenon suggests that even if social constructionists exercise more caution such inconsistencies will remain. They imply that this sort of inconsistency - treating the ontological status of some classes of object as given and others as questionable - is an unavoidable feature of social problems arguments.

The successful social problems explanation depends on making problematic the truth status of certain states of affairs selected for analysis and explanation, while backgrounding or minimising the possibility that the same problems apply to assumptions upon which the analysis depends. (1985:216)

They are particularly critical of the way in which social constructionists 'apply relativism
to the definitional activities of others, but fail to consider its relevance for their own explanatory formulations' (1985b:159)

Woolgar and Pawluch (1985b) go on to consider 'How shall we move beyond constructivism?' and suggest that questions such as 'what rhetorical strategies do we use to construct our explanations? what forms of presentation can be used to interrogate the nature of those strategies' (p162) pose new and fruitful questions, and indicate a way out of what they identify as the inevitable contradictions of social constructionism. Woolgar has made similar pleas for greater reflexivity within studies of scientific knowledge and practice (1983, 1988). While acknowledging that examining the rhetorical strategies which constitute social problems explanations will not contribute to 'our understanding of the world as we have traditionally conceived that pursuit' (Woolgar and Pawluch 1985b:162), the rationale for greater reflexivity is that it offers the opportunity to 'reappraise traditional conceptions of our pursuit of knowledge' (ibid). Thus the aim is not to contribute either to an understanding of social problems activity or of scientific knowledge but rather to contribute to a 'thoroughgoing sociology of knowledge' (Woolgar 1988:48). Not surprisingly this belief in the benefits of moving towards greater reflexivity has not been uncritically received either within social problems research or SSK.

In 1992 Collins and Yearley published 'Epistemological Chicken' in which they criticised SSK for its ever increasing relativism, likening its proponents to participants in a game of chicken where each tries to be the last to cross the road in front of passing cars. They suggested that as participants in a game of chicken risk being run over, so those proposing ever increasing relativism come close to 'self destruction' (p308). They acknowledge the possibility of deconstructing their own accounts but question the usefulness of the 'progressive regress' (1992b:380). In contrast to Woolgar's identification of 'lapses into realism' as a problem which dogs social constructionism, Collins and Yearley recommend that such 'meta-alternation' should be accepted as a principle, rather than treated as a failing. Their approach is pragmatic, accepting that analysts move from one dimension to another in the course of developing explanations:

We say, choose the dimension upon which you want to work according to the goals you have in mind. (1992b:378)
Unsurprisingly Collins and Yearley’s suggestions that reflexivity serves little useful purpose, and their pragmatic response to the ‘greasy pole’ of social constructionism have resulted in further debate and disagreement within SSK (see for instance, Woolgar 1992, Callon & Latour 1992, Roth 1994).

In the social problems area Ibarra and Kitsuse (1994) argue that a clear distinction between the practical project that members are involved in (making claims about a condition) and the theoretical project that the sociologist is engaged in is fundamental to a constructionist methodological stance (1994:29). They suggest that a contextual constructionist position blurs this distinction and sociologists end up making claims about the ‘truth’ of conditions in the same way as participants. This distinction between a practical and a theoretical project perhaps provides an additional explanation of why so many studies fail to adhere to a strict constructionist position. While attracted by the insights of social constructionism and the possibilities it opens up for sociological exploration of domains that seem initially entirely un-social, many sociologists find it hard and perhaps undesirable to eschew totally any practical project. This is likely to be more of a dilemma for those involved in providing analyses of social problems than for those interested in scientific knowledge.

Even where social constructionist analyses of social problems attempt to adhere to the theoretical project of accounting for the emergence and maintenance of claims making activities, the very act of selecting claims making activities to focus upon may be seen as participating in a ‘practical project’. Social constructionist analyses of social problems often serve to provide an alternative to the established account of the phenomena. The collection by Sarbin and Kitsuse provides a clear example of this with many papers serving to present, and implicitly support, the view of ‘the underdog’.

Thus, reports of constructionist research often present arguments that are infused with various moral perspectives. (Sarbin & Kitsuse 1994:9)

Lynch (1994) also notes how, in their efforts to adhere to the principles of symmetry and impartiality, constructionist studies:

may seem to promote a vanquished or marginal theory at the expense of the victorious or established program. (p78)
The recommendation to attempt to adhere to a theoretical project is made while recognising that in everyday life 'we presume a reality independent of our accounting procedures' (Woolgar 1983:246). Thus the social constructionist position is counter-intuitive and sometimes appears to run counter to common-sense - of course there is a 'reality' out there. However it is this very feature of social constructionism - questioning what seems to be so obviously given - which provides it with its analytic potential. It takes the sociological charge to show that things might be other than they appear to its very limits.

Social constructionism continues to be popular, as the incorporation of aspects of the approach into many sociological analyses of environmental issues demonstrates (see Ch3). Before moving on to examine this body of work more closely, some outline of the constructionist position which will be adopted in this thesis is necessary. First, while understanding the objections raised by Sismondo against the consideration of material reality as socially constructed I do not accept that this involves 'abandoning any commitment to things in themselves' as he suggests. It is possible to concede the reality of 'things in themselves' while maintaining that what those things are, what they are called, and what they mean are socially constructed. Secondly, with Collins and Yearley I take a pragmatic approach to the shifting between different levels of analysis which characterises social constructionist accounts. Their recommendation to be clear about the goals of the analysis that you are producing seems to be a good one. This recommendation can also be applied to the issue of whether social constructionist analyses are implicitly pursuing moral or political goals while claiming a neutral or impartial position. The advice routinely made to researchers to be aware of, and to acknowledge the commitments which inform their research should apply to those producing social constructionist analyses as much as to any other sociologist. Finally, with regard to the issue of the usefulness of social constructionist analyses, while supporting attempts to adhere to a theoretical project I do not accept the criticism that sometimes follows that social constructionist analyses serve no useful purpose. In presenting an alternative account of a 'problem' some contribution is inevitably made to the 'practical project'. In addition even in cases where no policy or practical implications are clear at the time of writing, the analysis may well prove useful at a later date. The relationship between research and policy will be considered in more detail later (p60), with particular regard to social constructionist analyses of environmental issues.
Conclusion - The Social Construction of Social Impacts

Despite the development of a substantial literature on the assessment of social impacts little attention has been paid to developing a definition of the concept. Most of the literature implicitly adopts a functional model of impact and assumes an unproblematic distinction between social and environmental impacts. In sum the process of social impact is under theorised. Social constructionism provides an ideal approach for developing a better understanding of the process of social impact. It offers a way of exploring questions such as how some things get identified and responded to as impacts while others do not, and provide a richer understanding of how impacts are constructed as serious.

As outlined in Chapter 1 one of the key debates within the SIA literature has been the extent to which SIA should consider 'subjective' impacts such as local people's feelings about new developments, and also the place of 'subjective' or qualitative analysis in the assessment. To date most SIAs have focused on economic data and employed quantitative analysis - a situation considered undesirable by those who claim that understanding what a development means to local people is essential for the assessment of its impact. The social constructionist approach to social impact developed in this thesis enables a detailed exploration of local people’s claims about social impacts - as Sarbin and Kitsuse say 'members' stories are the raw materials for constructionist research' (1994:8). However this does not mean that the analysis is confined to what have been previously deemed to be 'subjective' impacts. In line with the recommendations of the strong programme and strict constructionism, no distinction is made between those impacts that can be measured and those that people perceive to be real. What is considered here are those things which local people consider to be impacts whether these are 'objective' impacts such as noise or pollution, or 'subjective' impacts such as changes in the 'feel' of the place in which they live. Participants claims are not assessed on the basis of whether they are true or false but are analyzed in order to understand how social impacts are constructed.

The aim here is to provide a sociological analysis of social impacts and particularly to demonstrate how they are socially constructed, rather than to contribute directly to methodologies for the assessment of social impacts. It is probably fair to say that most of those writing in the SIA field are not particularly concerned with developing a sociology
of SIA, but rather with making contributions to its effective practice. As such to illustrate how social impacts are socially constructed may seem of little consequence. However, drawing such a distinction between sociology and practice is unhelpful and rules out fruitful interaction between the two (see page 60 for a discussion of the complicated relationship between theory and practice). Although it is not the primary aim of this thesis, the opportunity to reflect upon and theorise the process of social impact may yield insights which prove useful to those concerned with the development of SIA methodology.

An analysis of the social construction of social impacts also contributes to the developing field of the sociology of the environment. The following chapter introduces this area and draws particular attention to the debate which is proving to be central in the area about the relative merits of realist and social constructionist approaches to environmental issues. To date the literature on SIA has developed more or less in isolation from the wider theoretical debates pursued in the sociology of the environment. This thesis provides an opportunity to integrate the two areas and thus contribute to both.
Chapter 3

Social Constructionism and the Sociology of the Environment

This chapter provides a review of the sociology of the environment, outlining both realist and constructionist approaches. The field is depicted as emerging with a strong realist and moral agenda and as a consequence the development of constructionist studies of environmental issues has met with some hostility. The realist critique of social constructionist studies of environmental issues is examined and then rejected on the basis of a variety of counter arguments. It is concluded that social constructionism provides a useful and exciting contribution to sociology of the environment, and the approach could usefully be applied to develop a better understanding of social impacts alongside other environmental issues.

Although the sociology of the environment is a comparatively new and small area within the discipline, in recent years publications in the area have proliferated. It is difficult to provide an exact assessment of the size of the field in terms of number of books or papers published, however some idea of the growth in the area can be given by the observation that Routledge (one of the foremost social science publishers in the UK) now has two book series devoted to the area - the Global Environmental Change Series and the Environment and Society Series. An indication that sociology of the environment is now considered to be an important subfield of the discipline is also provided by the recent (1995) publication of a collection of 97 papers on the subject in a volume entitled The Sociology of the Environment, published as part of a series entitled 'The International Library of Critical Writing in Sociology' (Edward Elgar Publishing Limited). Given the rapidly expanding nature of the field it is not possible to provide a comprehensive review of the entire literature. However what follows aims to illustrate the main foci of studies and debates within the area.

The Emergence of Environmental Sociology

In February 1991 Howard Newby, then chairman of the UK Economic and Social Research
Council (ESRC), gave a lecture to mark the fortieth Anniversary of the founding of the British Sociological Association (BSA). The lecture was entitled ‘One World, Two Cultures: Sociology and the Environment’ and paved the way for the announcement later in the same year that the ESRC was to fund a major research programme into Global Environmental Change (GEC). The central theme of Newby’s lecture was that the social sciences are central to the study of the environment but that:

The contribution of Sociology to the public debate on environmental change, and even to debates within the social sciences has hitherto been negligible...(Newby 1991:1)

He outlined a variety of possible reasons for this state of affairs concluding that the main reason was sociologists’ reluctance to re-examine and re-conceptualise the link between society and nature (ibid:7).

Within his lecture Newby conceded that his claim was ‘exaggerated for effect’ (p6) and acknowledged the contribution of a handful of British writers. However he maintained that overall the contribution of sociology ‘has been negligible’ (p6). He argued that sociological research on environmental issues had focused on the study of environmental values and environmental organisations (see Lowe and Goyder 1983) and had not engaged with the ’material aspects’ (p7) of environmental change. Although this claim had some truth in terms of British Sociology, it ignored a substantial body of work initiated by American sociologists who had begun to address these issues over a decade earlier.

Most notable of these were William Catton and Riley Dunlap who, like Newby, were convinced that Sociology should respond to environmental change. In a series of papers published in the late 1970s and early 1980s (e.g. Catton and Dunlap 1978, 1980, Dunlap and Catton 1979) they outlined the grounds for the development of an Environmental Sociology which they believed would constitute a paradigmatic shift for the discipline. The crux of their argument was that:

The changed ecological conditions confronting human societies seriously challenge sociology, for the discipline developed in an era when humans seemed exempt from ecological constraints. Disciplinary traditions and assumptions that evolved during the age of exuberant growth imbued sociology with a worldview or paradigm which impedes recognition of the societal significance of current ecological realities. Thus sociology stands in need of a fundamental alteration in its disciplinary paradigm
Catton and Dunlap characterised the 'Dominant Western Worldview' as strongly anthropocentric and optimistic about the possibility of continual progress. They argued that sociology has been informed by this profoundly un-ecological worldview - being premised on a belief in the firm distinction between humans and other animals, and faith in continual social progress. In addition they drew attention to the contribution of two of sociology's founders - Durkheim and Weber - in ensuring that the discipline was based on 'an ecologically unsound set of assumptions about human societies' (1980:18). Durkheim's legacy was his insistence on the distinction of the social from the natural world, embodied in his assertion that the cause of a social fact must always be another social as opposed to a biological, psychological or physical fact. Catton and Dunlap suggested that this had translated into a general taboo within the discipline against the reduction of social facts to biological and physical variables, and had affected the choice of variables which sociologists were able to consider as explanations for human behaviour. In his 1991 lecture to the BSA Newby reiterated this point arguing that:

The very character of sociology in the nineteenth century emerged out of attempts to delineate the 'social' from 'human nature', and to assert the dominance of the cultural (nurture) over the evolutionary (nature). (op cit:7)

Weber's contribution to the un-ecological bias of the discipline was his emphasis on the importance of understanding how individuals define their situations. Catton and Dunlap argued that within this interpretive tradition actors' definitions of their situation have been taken to be influenced by their interpretations of the actions and beliefs of other people around them, rather than by the physical characteristics of a situation. Physical properties become relevant only if they are identified as such by actors.

Catton and Dunlap concluded that together these influences constitute a 'set of conceptual blinders' (1980:22) which have made it difficult for sociologists to recognise the importance of the environmental problems that are now the subject of considerable public concern (ibid:22). They referred to this outlook as the Human Exemptionalist Paradigm (HEP) as it treats human societies as if they were exempt from environmental constraints - humans are seen as distinct from other forms of life, their behaviour is not seen as constrained or
facilitated by aspects of the natural environment and it is assumed that human progress can continue indefinitely with no acknowledgement of any natural limits to growth.

Catton and Dunlap argued that if sociology is to contribute to understanding and addressing environmental problems it needs to shake off its anthropocentrism and to acknowledge natural limits to growth. They were optimistic that such changes were already underway. Indications from surveys that public values and attitudes were beginning to shift and become more environmental provided them with hope that the dominant western worldview was being eroded. In addition the emergence of sociological research on the interactions between humans and the environment (for example Schnaiberg’s (1975) work on the societal impacts of resource scarcity and Burch’s (1976) study of the links between social inequality, environmental degradation and health) heralded a parallel change within sociology. For Catton and Dunlap this emerging sociological literature signalled an important development within the discipline:

by their acceptance of environmental variables as relevant for understanding human behaviour and social organisation…(they) implicitly challenge the HEP. (1980:32)

They claimed that the HEP was on the verge of being replaced by a New Ecological Paradigm (NEP). The image of human societies provided by the NEP is fundamentally different from that provided by the HEP. In sharp contrast to the anthropocentric bias of the HEP it stresses the ecosystem dependence of human societies. Its main departures from the HEP are the ideas that: while humans have exceptional characteristics (culture, technology etc.) they remain one among many species that are interdependently involved in the global ecosystem; that social life is influenced not only by social and cultural factors but also by environmental ones; and that resources are finite and thus there are absolute limits to growth. Dunlap and Catton claimed that the distinguishing feature of the emergent Environmental Sociology is the willingness of its practitioners to examine relationships between social and environmental variables, thus breaking the traditional taboo against including 'nonsocial' variables in sociological analyses. They suggested that environmental sociologists should examine the probable societal impacts of nonsocial phenomena, both in terms of individual effects (e.g. of pollution on health) and wider societal consequences (e.g. effect of resource scarcity on patterns of conflict and competition). The sociological programme they outlined was one in which the discipline would become 'greener', paying
more attention to the causes and consequences of environmental changes.

Newby’s (1991) lecture can be seen as an important landmark in the development of Environmental Sociology in the UK, not only for its exhortation to sociologists to pay attention to environmental issues, but preceding as it did the availability of substantial funds to enable that research. The agenda Newby outlined was clearly a realist one. Like Catton and Dunlap he stressed the reality and severity of environmental problems paying particular attention to issues of resource depletion and their implications for society. Echoing Catton and Dunlap’s critique of Weber’s legacy, he criticised existing sociological work on the environment, for instance that on environmental values and organisations, for failing to engage with the material dimensions of environmental change:

The environment’ is interpreted not materially, but culturally, as a set of symbols which furnish, in the contemporary world, the predominant vocabulary of discontent. Environmental change is analyzed, not for what it is, but for what it symbolises. (1991:6)

This appeal for sociologists to contribute to debate on the causes and consequences of environmental change has been taken up by a number of British sociologists. For example Luke Martell’s (1994) book 'Ecology and Society; an introduction' is an attempt to demonstrate how social and political thought can enrich ecology, while ecology, in turn, can bring fresh and useful insights to the social sciences. His commitment to environmentalism is clear and he stresses the importance of sociological approaches which acknowledge the objective nature of environmental problems (ibid:124). For instance he outlines the relationship between industrial systems and the environment, drawing attention to the environmental impacts of industrialism, and the ensuing implications for industrial economies of resource depletion and environmental degradation.

Dickens (1992) is less concerned with environmental problems than with the reciprocal relationship between society and nature. He presents his book Society and Nature: Towards a Green Social Theory as an attempt to respond to Catton and Dunlap’s challenge to produce sociology grounded within an ecological paradigm. His too is an explicitly realist agenda being concerned to illustrate the degree of reciprocity between the social and the natural spheres. In common with Catton and Dunlap, Newby, and Martell he criticises sociological approaches to the environment which have:
remained almost entirely social, or what scientists might call cultural (1992:6)
and argues that sociology is unable to respond to environmental problems as it insists on
a rigid division between the social and the natural. Dickens’s proposal is for the
development of new alliances between the natural and social sciences which would enable
the integrated study of environmental issues:

A way forward is the development of a unified approach, one which...recognises that
people are part of nature and vice versa. (ibid:15)

He is optimistic that this proposal is workable, drawing attention to the early work of Marx
and Engels in which nature is conceptualised as man’s inorganic body; to the ’new biology’
of Goodwin et al. (1990) which draws attention to the reciprocal relationships between
organisms and their environment; and to elements of contemporary psychology such as
Harre et al.’s (1985) work which draws attention to the ’development or unfolding of
individuals’ capacities within distinctive types of environment’ (Dickens op cit:134).

Dickens is not alone in the desire to see an end to the split between natural and social
biology and social science. He argues that when considering subjects such as gender,
inequalities in physical health and mental illness, maintaining the segregation of biological
and social scientific research is counterproductive. He argues for the development of new
models which recognise the interactions between the social and the biological. Similarly
in the sphere of environmental research he argues that:

the constitutive dualisms of biology/society, nature/culture and cause/meaning
obstruct the sociological investigation of the relations between these abstractly
counterpoised domains. (1991:7)

Newby (1991) acknowledges that there have been good reasons for sociologists to fight shy
of explanations which draw on natural or biological factors. He writes that awareness of
the political misuse of biological determinism has resulted in a situation where even to
begin to discuss the possibility of the natural or biological affecting the social is to run the
risk of ’being tainted with an abhorrent political philosophy’ (1991:7). He too argues for
the need for a thorough reconceptualisation of the relations between the social and the
natural in order to find solutions to ’our pressing environmental problems’ (ibid:8). Again
these argument had been made earlier by Dunlap and Catton (1983) in their emphasis on
the need for environmental sociologists to 'overcome their fear of being charged with reductionism and environmental determinism' (1983:125) in studying the reciprocal relationships between society and the environment.

These authors all share a conviction of the reality of environmental problems. They argue that sociology needs to change in order to respond to debate about the causes and consequences of these problems, and hopefully to help to mitigate or avoid their effects. They consider a reconceptualisation of the relationship between the social and natural to be imperative; arguing that sociologists need to overcome their 'phobia' (Dunlap and Catton 1983:124) of engaging with issues of nature. They also share a critique of sociological approaches which they consider to be concerned only with the symbolic, cultural or social aspects of environmental change rather than their material reality. Those adhering to this position are Environmental Sociologists - they are committed to developing a more ecological or environmental sociology. Thus the agenda for sociologists interested in environmental issues was set up as a distinctly realist and moral one - environmental problems have serious implications for society, and sociologists should do what they can to help understand and address them.

Social Constructionist Analyses of Environmental Issues

Alongside the emergence of this realist Environmental Sociology has come a proliferation

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1 Terminology is confusing in this area too - Environmental Sociology emerged with a clear realist agenda and was an attempt to develop a more environmental, or greener, sociology. Other sociologists (e.g. Yearley 1991) argued that sociology is capable of providing useful analyses of environmental issues in its current form and characterised their work as sociology of the environment - the sociological study of environmental issues rather than sociology informed by environmental issues. Dunlap & Catton (1994:7) adhere to this distinction characterising work on the socially constructed aspects of ecological problems as sociology of the environment, and that concerned with analyzing the social causes and consequences of such problems as environmental sociology. However some sociologists have produced constructionist studies of environmental issues yet characterise their work as contributing to environmental sociology (for instance Hannigan (1995) Environmental Sociology: A Social Constructionist Perspective and Greider and Garkovitch who consider the social construction of nature and the environment but position themselves 'as environmental sociologists' (1994:5)). To avoid further confusion I use Environmental Sociology to cover the more realist approaches, while constructionist studies are taken to be contributing to a sociology of the environment.
of social constructionist studies of environmental issues. Although the two bodies of work have developed in parallel few of the constructionist studies are contributions to, or critiques of the field of Environmental sociology. Rather the majority of studies have their roots in existing research areas within sociology, notably, the study of social problems, SSK, research on the media, and in the emerging field of risk. There is not yet a coherent body of work on the social construction of the environment and environmental issues, rather a disparate array of studies addressing different substantive topics, and employing different forms of constructionist analysis.

Environmental Problems as Social Problems

From the beginning of the social constructionist approach to social problems its applicability to the analysis of environmental problems was acknowledged. In one of the papers which Spector and Kitsuse (1987) cite as an important precursor of their own work, Blumer (1971) lists environmental pollution and ecological destruction among a long list of issues recognised as social problems by and in a society. Over the years Social Problems (the journal in which many exemplars of social constructionist analyses of social problems, and key debates about the approach have been published) has included a number of constructionist analyses of environmental issues. The approach is particularly appealing for analyzing environmental problems as they are often only manifest through the claims made about them. Beck (1992) points out that one of the distinguishing features of the environmental dangers or risks that have become the focus for contemporary public concern is that they are not perceptible to the senses. He paints a graphic picture of how the environmental hazards of the past, such as open sewers, could be seen and smelt, whereas the hazards now of concern, such as pollution and radiation, are not readily perceptible. People only know about these hazards and become concerned about them as a result of the claims made by scientists and taken up by the media. Similarly Best (1989) draws attention to the key role played by the claims of politicians and the press in placing ozone depletion on the list of contemporary social problems:

Suppose that no-one noticed the declining ozone levels, or that politicians and the press refused to take the issue seriously...it would not be on anyone's list of social problems. (1989:xvii)

and Tester makes a more radical claim about global warming:

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If we take a problem like global warming, the point is precisely that this process is not readily amenable to any kind of empirical proof. The case for an environmental problem...can only be stipulated...the case for global warming can only be asserted and it is accepted purely as a matter of faith. (1994:4)

In common with other social constructionist studies of social problems, studies of the social construction of environmental problems tend to be characterised by the 'ontological gerrymandering' identified by Woolgar and Pawluch, and also display the difficulty of adhering to a theoretical project when analyzing environmental issues (see p29-32).

For instance Schoenfeld et al (1979) examine the role of the national press in the USA in the initial construction of 'the environment' as a social problem. They concentrate on the evolution of the terminology of 'environment' reviewing newspapers, periodicals and book indexes from the late 1950s to early 1970s. They suggest that as early claims makers attempt to attract others to their proposed point of view, they are aided significantly if they can find a distinctive term for their overall concern, if only for the convenience of headline writers. Thus the examination of the evolution of a particular term can provide some clues to the recruiting activities of claims makers in the early construction of a social problem. Their research suggested that prior to 1969/79 the press were slow to report the views of early environmental claims makers. In explaining why this situation changed at the end of the 1960s they draw attention to external events and the rise of public concern: by 1969-70, the environment imperative in all its manifest interdependencies had become so compelling of attention that the press simply had to respond more comprehensively. Hence the appearance of environmental reporters, environmental columns, even environmental sections. (1979:54)

Schoenfeld et al present their work as informed by Spector and Kitsuse’s argument that 'social problems are products of particular constructions of social reality. rather than, necessarily of actual physical conditions’ (p38). However while concentrating on the development of claims in the press, in their acceptance that 'the environment imperative’ has become 'so compelling of attention’ they clearly retain a commitment to the 'reality’ of environmental change.

Capek’s (1993) exploration of the emergence and application of the concept of 'environmental justice' in a campaign about contaminated land in Texas provides another
clear example of the prevalence of contextual constructionist analyses. She makes no attempt to 'background' either the existence of a 'real' problem or the seriousness of the condition. For instance she writes:

Many residents were unaware of the seriousness of the contamination until they read about it in the newspaper or were informed by a local environmental organisation. (p10)

In addition Capek clearly favours residents' accounts that their neighbourhood is polluted over those of the corporation who own the site whom she depicts as giving residents 'false assurances' (p12) about the safety of the area. Thus in some important ways she adheres to a realist position. However in focusing on the framing of the issue she takes a clearly constructionist position. She points out that drawing attention to the symbolic dimensions of protest is important because:

symbols themselves become resources to movements (p6)

Thus her analysis can sit alongside more realist analyses of the way in which structural features such as the social class of participants influence the course and outcome of campaigns. She draws attention to the practical importance for protestors of finding a successful way of framing their claims:

residents' ability to mobilise effectively for social change was intimately linked to their gradual adoption of an 'environmental justice' frame. (p6)

and argues that:

Defining a situation as unjust is more than an act of categorisation; it implies a strategy for action. (p7)

Aronnoff and Gunter (1992) also consider a case study of local responses to the chemical contamination of land. Like Capek they are interested in the social structural context of environmental disputes as well as the construction of claims about the issue, and they attempt to address both aspects:

Social constructivist approaches to social problems can expand our understanding of local actors' responses to contamination... (and) counter deterministic assumptions of local disempowerment, (but) if they focus exclusively on the claims making activities of local actors they may understate the debilitating impacts of these disasters. (1992:346)

Thus they too are interested in the construction of an environmental problem, but maintain
a realist stance towards its 'the debilitating impacts'. In order to deal with both dimensions they advocate using Giddens' theory of structuration (Giddens 1984) to provide a framework within which the relationship between structural elements and action in such disputes can be conceptualised.

SSK and the Social Construction of Environmental Issues

Other social constructionist analyses of environmental issues have their roots within the sociology of scientific knowledge. The focus within the field on the social processes by which scientific 'discoveries' come to be taken as facts, and on the factors which inform the development of research programmes has been applied to environmental problems. Hart and Victor (1993) focus on climate change policy and are interested in how issues get turned into problems, specifically how programmes of scientific research are initiated and develop. They conclude that:

The threat of global warming was only one motivation for these research programmes. (p667)

and indicate that social factors such as scientists' need to secure research funding may well have been more important. Boehmer-Chrisiansen (1994) also explores the global warming debate, and like Hart and Victor draws attention to the interests which lie behind the construction of this problem. She asks how and why scientists created concern in the first place, and how the research topic of climate change came so quickly to be enshrined in the Framework Convention on Climate Change signed at the earth summit in Rio in 1992. Her answer suggests that global warming was attractive for different reasons to politicians, scientists and environmental networks all pursuing their own distinct goals.

Mazur and Lee (1993) focus on the role of the media in influencing public concern about environmental issues. They adopt a 'quantity of coverage' theory which states that it is the amount of coverage an issue receives in the press, rather than the actual content of the stories, which has most influence on public concern about the issue. They take the issues of ozone depletion, the greenhouse effect and 'problems of the biosphere' (p700) carefully considering the factors which led to each receiving extensive press coverage. Their conclusion that there is no clear link between scientific findings on environmental matters and the development of coverage of the issues in the press has much in common with both
Hart and Victors' and Boehmer-Christiansen's analyses:

Problems that do attract heavy news coverage usually do so for non-scientific reasons, either through powerful manipulation of reporters by activists or by luck. (p713)

Others have focused on the relationship between scientific findings and environmental policy formation. Herrick and Jamieson (1995) take as their topic the National Acid Precipitation Assessment Programme (NAPAP) set up by the US congress to investigate acid rain and to recommend strategies for dealing with it. They note that the stated objective of the programme was to produce an unbiased scientific understanding upon which to develop policy, but argue that:

it is a mistake to suppose that 'good science' can always provide a 'right answer' for science based policy disputes. (p105)

This claim derives from their clear constructionist position which draws attention to the existence of competing definitions of problems:

There is no such thing as a generic problem. Problems are defined characterised and constructed, not given to us by brute nature alone.(p108)

In applying this approach to acid rain they note that a number of different scientific perspectives can be drawn upon to explain it (e.g. chemical, meteorological, biological, ecological, social) and each would define, characterise and measure the 'problem' in different ways. Thus the science itself will not lead to clear conclusions, value judgements are necessary in deciding which findings are relevant and which strategies appropriate. They conclude that:

A global change research programme should not simply fall out of what a science or policy community regards as important. For such a policy to be successful there must be widespread agreement on what questions are being asked, why they are important, what counts as answers to them, and what the social use of these answers might be. (p112)

All of these studies focus on the social factors and interests which inform whether a problem comes to prominence. In common with the studies of environmental issues which have developed within the social problems arena they do not pay much attention to the reality of the conditions, yet make passing references which suggest an acceptance of them.
For instance: Hart and Victor claim that 'the threat of global warming' was only one motivation for the development of research programmes in climate change; Boehemer-Christiansen and Herrick and Lee are concerned to improve the way in which environmental policy is currently made; and Mazur and Lee make their acceptance most explicit of all stating that:

it is well established on reasonably objective grounds that CFCs deplete stratospheric ozone under certain conditions, that global temperatures have reached record highs during the 1980s as concentrations of greenhouse gases increase, and that rain forests and species are being lost. (1993:714)

The Social Construction of Environmental Risk

Environmental risk is a concept that is receiving increasing interest from psychologists, geographers and sociologists as well as engineers and scientists. Studies which draw attention to the social construction of risk issues have begun to emerge amongst the variety of other perspectives on offer (e.g. those exemplified by White 1974, Tversky & Kahnemann 1973, Douglas & Wildavsky 1982, Renn 1991). These share the concern evident in the social constructionist studies which have developed within SSK of elaborating the social issues that lie behind particular constructions of risk.

Tierney (1994) provides a comprehensive review of sociology's contribution to risk research, which she characterises as being divided into two general areas with work focusing either on the social and cultural factors which influence the selection of 'risk objects' (see for instance Johnson and Covello 1987), or seeking to identify the social factors that influence the formal risk analysis process. In the second of these areas social constructionism is applied to risk analysis in the way that it has been applied to other sorts of scientific enterprise, focusing particularly on the institutional constraints that influence how analyses are conducted. Much of the work Tierney discusses draws attention to the way in which organisational interests are served by supporting a particular construction of risk, for instance Kendall's (1991) research which examines the organisational interests behind the construction of nuclear power as safe, and Clarke's (1990) on the role played by key institutional actors in framing estimates of the risks associated with oil spills. In contrast much research within the risk field concentrates on the individual and psychological factors which determine how people assess and respond to risks (e.g. Slovic;
Tierney argues that public judgments of risk and safety are influenced by organisational strategies that seek to frame risks in particular ways. She identifies institutional power and resources as key determinants of the power to persuade people effectively. Tierney maintains that:

this constructivist approach does not claim that there is no objective basis for believing that certain risks exist. (1994:8)

but that the key sociological emphasis should be on how certain things are identified as risky.

Stallings (1994) addresses the same question of how a certain definition of a threat or danger is produced and maintained. He concentrates specifically on the threat of earthquakes in the USA and asks why there is so little public attention to the threat. His conclusion is that the lack of public concern is a consequence of the general construction of earthquakes as acts of nature rather than catastrophes which have their roots in human action, and argues that this limits the potential for grass-roots mobilisation for protection from the threat as it is placed in the realm of nature rather than that of human agency. His implicit acceptance of the reality of the risk is evident in his question of why there is little public interest in this 'threat'.

The Role of the Media in the Social Construction of Environmental Problems

Another focus within the literature is on the role of the media as it clearly plays a key part in the development and elaboration of environmental claims whether they are being made by scientific experts or environmental groups. A particular interest is in the relationship between media representations or framing of issues and public opinion on them. Gamson and Modigliani (1989) stress that the link between public opinion and media discourse should not be conceptualised as a one way process but is interactive, the media is just one part of 'the public's tool kit' (p10) in making sense of and deciding on an appropriate response to, current affairs. They take the case of nuclear power and trace the 'careers' of different 'interpretive packages' used since 1945, and account for the greater public appeal of certain 'packages' in terms of their ability to resonate with wider cultural themes. They also pay attention to the social and political factors behind different packages, drawing attention to the way in which environmental organisations have sponsored anti-nuclear
packages and public officials have sponsored pro-nuclear ones. Gamson and Modigliani’s work concludes with some practical recommendations. They argue that if a better understanding is to be developed of the relationship between press coverage of and public concern about environmental issues then changes need to made to the methodologies used to gauge public opinion. They criticise the fixed choice questionnaires which are generally used as they obscure ambivalence and tend to conflate those with no attitude on a given issue with those whose attitude does not fit into the given categories. They suggest that it is:

Only by methods that elicit more of the interpretive process will we be able to see the extent to which different media packages have become part of the public’s tool kit in making sense of the world of public affairs. (1989:36)

Hansen (1991) agrees with Gamson and Modigliani that the relationship between media coverage and public opinion should not be seen as a deterministic one. He argues for a more sophisticated exploration of the ways in which different publics negotiate and interpret the environmental meanings offered by the media. A good empirical example of this process is provided in Burgess and Harrison’s (1993) study of a development consortium’s plans to build a theme park on a site designated for nature conservation. They explored both how the local and national media reported the competing claims about the proposed development and also how these claims in all their different forms (press, TV, radio, public meetings) were appraised and interpreted by local people. They conclude that media texts are seldom instrumental in opinion formation and point to the importance of ‘practical life, lived locally’ (1993:218) in determining what sense people make of the competing claims they are presented with.

Hansen takes up Gamson and Modigliani’s suggestion that certain ways of framing issues contribute to their public appeal, and suggests that if issues can be cast in terms which resonate with existing and widely held cultural concepts this is likely to result in them receiving wider media coverage. He draws attention to the way in which some issues link into powerful, historically established symbolic imagery. He provides the example of the way in which nuclear power and radiation related issues are marked out from other environmental issues as they draw on deep seated and long standing public fears associated with anything nuclear. Not all environmental issues ‘benefit’ from a culturally deep seated
imagery of the same symbolic richness as the nuclear issue and Hansen suggests they are disadvantaged by this in competition for elaboration in the media:

The extent to which they can be anchored in and made to activate chains of cultural meaning... helps determine whether they become part of media coverage and wider social elaboration. (1991:453)

These social constructionist analyses of environmental issues have emerged as extensions of existing traditions within sociology, and do not present themselves as explicit contributions to the field of Environmental Sociology. There are relatively few social constructionist analyses of environmental issues which do locate themselves as part of Environmental Sociology, or at least a Sociology of the Environment. Yearley’s (1991) *The Green Case: A Sociology of Environmental Issues, Arguments and Politics*, was perhaps the first attempt to develop a wide ranging and clearly constructionist Sociology of the Environment. His work is informed both by the social problems approach and by SSK. The social problems approach is most marked in his analysis of the green movement as a collection of agencies making social problems claims. Through a series of profiles of environmental groups (Royal Society for Nature Conservation, Greenpeace and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) he draws attention to the social and political factors which enable or constrain a group in making social problems claims which come to taken as credible. His interest in how environmental organisations get to frame the environmental agenda complements Tierney’s interest in identifying how organisations come to have the power to influence public perceptions of which risks are serious. Both conclude that the focus of public and political concern on certain environmental problems and risks is the result of a social process and attempt to identify the resources which facilitate the ability to persuade others. Insights from SSK are drawn upon in his consideration of the implications for the green movement of its reliance on science. Here he draws attention to the conclusions of studies which demonstrate the socially constructed nature of scientific facts, to the existence of disputes over what the 'facts' are, and to the lack of a straightforward link between scientific findings and policy recommendations, to suggest that science does not offer the definitive answers to environmental problems which the movement seeks. Despite being explicitly geared towards developing 'A Sociology of Environmental Issues' Yearley makes no mention of the Environmental Sociology of
Dunlap and Catton et al.

Hannigan (1995) however does locate his social constructionist analysis of environmental issues within the existing field of Environmental Sociology. His book *Environmental Sociology: A Social Constructionist Perspective* is probably the most fully developed social constructionist analysis of environmental issues. He is critical of Dunlap and Catton’s approach which he characterises as paying insufficient attention to the process of social definition of environmental problems, and suggests that social constructionism offers an approach which is able to:

adequately account for the manner in which environmental problems are defined, articulated and acted upon by social actors. (1995:30)

To demonstrate the scope of the social constructionist approach he considers the roles of both science and the media in constructing environmental problems and discusses the construction of environmental risks and the construction of nature or the environment itself, before analyzing the social construction of three environmental problems in depth: acid rain, biodiversity loss and biotechnology. He concludes that:

The core of a new environmental sociology should principally lie not in documenting the social distribution of environmental value clusters nor in fleshing out a 'new human ecology' for the 1990s but rather in understanding how claims about environmental conditions are assembled, presented and contested. (ibid:187)

This idea that social constructionism provides the best way forward for environmental sociology is shared by Greider and Garkovitch (1994). They identify themselves as environmental sociologists but state that:

we believe the field needs to move away from an objectification or reification of natural meanings...and away from an increasingly dominant focus on the world that is there. (1994:5)

They provide an analysis of the social construction of nature and the environment which draws attention to the importance of what physical changes to the environment mean for different cultural groups. Along with Hannigan they conclude that social constructionism provides the best way forward for Environmental Sociology as:

it emphasises a well-established school of thought in sociology and role for the discipline in the debates over environmental issues. (ibid:21)
Overall then a body of social constructionist analyses of environmental issues is emerging, whether or not the authors of studies see themselves as contributing to the field of Environmental Sociology/Sociology of the Environment. These analyses are characterised by an interest in the social and cultural factors behind the construction of a particular problem, in the way in which claims about a problem are framed, and in the responses which different framings receive. Their focus is on the claims made about environmental issues rather than on the effects of environmental changes on society. In this they diverge from the strong realist orientation and moral agenda of Environmental Sociology, and as a consequence have come in for sustained criticism from those who locate themselves within this camp.

The Critique of Social Constructionist Analyses of Environmental Issues

In a discussion of the 'intellectual vitality' (1996:1) of Environmental Sociology, Dunlap notes that:

The vitality of our field is ...reflected by a growing number of journal articles, both empirical and theoretical. In terms of the latter, the relative merits of adopting a social constructivist/relativist versus an objectivist/realist perspective on environmental issues is receiving increasing attention. (ibid)

Realist environmental sociologists express impatience with the social constructionist approach to environmental issues claiming that it is simply the response of those who are resistant to the challenge of reconceptualising the relationship between the social and natural, and results in a dangerous solipsism and avoidance of real problems. Dunlap and Catton (1994) are clearly concerned that environmental sociology is straying away from the realist agenda which they outlined. They describe the emergence of social constructionist studies of environmental issues as 'unfortunate' (p5) as they divert attention from the 'fundamental subject matter' (ibid) of environmental sociology which is to understand the cause and consequences of environmental problems. Dunlap (1994) reiterates this criticism in a paper entitled 'Limitations of the social constructionist approach to environmental problems' in which he claims:

A staunchly constructivist approach to environmental sociology has significant shortcomings: (1) a reluctance to acknowledge the importance of objective conditions leads sociologists to avoid major issues e.g. human causes and consequences of global environmental change. (1994:abstract)
Martell argues similarly that:

It is important that a focus on the social definition of environmental problems should complement rather than be counterpoised to explanations based on the objective existence of environmental problems and wider economic and social processes involved in their articulation into socially defined issues. (1994:124)

He criticises social constructionist studies of environmental issues (e.g. Yearley’s (1991) analysis of environmental groups and Tester’s (1991) work on the discourse of animal rights) as being ‘too sociological’ and ‘overly social’ as they fail to acknowledge the ‘reality’ of the issues involved. Similarly Benton criticises ‘over socialised views of humanity and nature’ (1994:44) which:

yield a perspective in which the independent presence of the non-human world in our lives is marginal to the point of disappearance. (ibid:45)

Murphy’s (1996) critique of social constructionism is aimed primarily at SSK which he accuses of failing to take account of the influence of nature on scientific knowledge. He claims that ‘social constructivism has gone overboard’ (p970) in ignoring nature, and characterises the approach as ‘pre-ecological sociology’(p972). In common with other environmental sociologists he argues that sociology, and the sociology of science in particular, must change in response to the existence of environmental problems:

Through environmental problems and the environmental movement, the sociology of science is now confronted with the question of its capacity to go beyond the radically anthropocentric, restricted, and false premise of the social construction of reality in order to integrate into its interpretations the embeddedness of social action in nature and dependence on nature. (1994:972)

What these authors oppose are studies which they consider take social constructionism too far and ignore the reality and independent effects of the environment on human society. However despite their criticism they do not dismiss social constructionism out of hand, they are in favour of approaches which combine the insights of social constructionism alongside an acknowledgement of the independent effects of nature or the environment. So for instance Benton while criticising ‘oversocialised views of humanity and nature’ (1994:44) describes moves within sociology away from considerations of how material conditions affect social life to a ‘cultural analysis of the conceptual frameworks and valuations through which the society under consideration thinks and lives in relation to those conditions’ as ‘an absolutely indispensable moment, or aspect, of social analysis’ (1994:45). However he
claims that such an approach:

remains insufficient in so far as it is unable to grasp the ecological and social consequences of unacknowledged conditions of social practices in relation to nature, and their unintended or unforeseen consequences. (1994:45)

Catton and Dunlap argue similarly:

we certainly do not wish to deny that there is a definitional or constructivist dimension to environmental problems...nor that constructivist phenomena warrant sociological consideration. Rather our concern is that sociological investigations not be limited to such phenomena. (1994:20)

Martell also acknowledges some of the 'strengths' of social constructionist analyses, but argues that:

it is important that a focus on the social definition of environmental problems should complement rather than be counterpoised to explanations based on the objective existence of environmental problems and wider economic and social processes involved in their articulation into socially defined issues. (1994:125)

and Murphy says that he:

take(s) as confirmed the claim that ideas intervene between nature and its description, and that interests, values, conflict and power - in short, the social - shape our conceptions of reality and influence its formation. (1994:969)

but deplores the extent to which social constructionism has 'lost sight of nature' (ibid:958).

**Responses to the Realist Critique of Social Constructionist Analyses**

There are number of different ways in which one can respond to the realist critique of social constructionist analyses of environmental issues. Taken together these comprise a comprehensive rejection of its main points. First the assumption that social constructionist studies aim to throw doubt upon the reality of environmental problems can be shown to be a misreading of the constructionist project, and, as the review above illustrates, although the causes and consequences of environmental problems are not the focus for constructionist analyses, few of the available studies question their existence. Secondly, the insights of social constructionism can be turned in on this critique and used to demonstrate that it is problematic to take the existence of environmental problems or even the concepts of 'environment' or 'nature' as objective. Finally, although constructionist studies do not generally address themselves to the task of finding ways of mitigating the effects of
'environmental problems’, this does not mean that they have no implications for environmental policy or practice. These points will be considered in turn.

**Social Constructionism and Environmental 'Reality’**

The social constructionism at which realists aim their criticisms is an approach which claims there is no external environmental reality which is capable of affecting human society (Murphy 1994) or that 'at most the notion of a reality external to discourse is acknowledged as an unknowable ghostly presence' (Benton 1994:45). Much of the animosity towards the approach seems to spring from a subtle misreading of its intentions. Even those arguing for a strict constructionist position do not doubt the existence of external reality, the point is that what this reality 'is', what it means, is socially constructed. For instance Woolgar (1988) talks of representations constituting objects. This assumption that a strict constructionist approach amounts to trying to prove that there is no reality is evident not only in the realist literature, but also pervades social constructionist accounts of environmental issues. So for instance Mazur and Lee claim:

> We are not attracted to an extreme constructionist position - namely that the global ensemble of problems is primarily a creation of the media with little basis in objective conditions. (1993:714)

and Hannigan echoes them:

> I am not by any means attracted to an extreme constructionist position which insists that the global ensemble of problems is purely a creation of the media (or science or ecological activists) with little basis in objective conditions. On the contrary...I fully recognise the mess which we have created in the atmosphere, the soil and the waterways. (1996:3)

The distinction between a strict and a contextual constructionist position is muddled in these accounts. A contextual constructionist approach assumes that what is known about the reality and extent of environmental problems can be used to gauge the truth of the claims made about them (Best 1989). In contrast a strict constructionist position adheres to Spector and Kitsuse's recommendation that the sociologist should remain agnostic about the existence and extent of the conditions and simply consider the claims made about them. This does not amount to denying their existence. While both Mazur and Lee and Hannigan adhere to this position in their empirical analyses the pervasive caricature of strict constructionism as a denial of reality leads them to make these rather odd declarations of
their personal belief in the existence of environmental problems. The difficulty of adhering to a theoretical project when considering an issue about which there is widespread concern has been outlined earlier (p31). It may be that this difficulty is particularly acute in relation to environmental problems where being green has come increasingly to be equated with being good (Yearley 1991:1).

Not all authors of constructionist studies of environmental issues make such explicit declarations of their belief in the existence of environmental problems. For the majority the existence or severity of the problem is backgrounded - it is not the issue at hand. However as the review above shows, most implicitly accept the existence of the problems whose construction they study. In addition they do not necessarily advocate the use of social constructionist analysis to the exclusion of other approaches. As already noted Aronoff and Gunter (1992), and Capek (1993) provide analyses in which a consideration of the socially constructed nature of environmental issues is considered alongside their structural causes and consequences. Yearley makes a similar point:

In studying the shaping of the environmental movement it is important not to restrict one’s enquiries to the actions of players in the environmental game. One should also take account of the influence exerted by structures and institutions (1991:7)

Despite these exceptions it is correct to say that most constructionist studies of environmental issues do not use the approach in conjunction with other modes of analysis. However this does not imply, as the realist critics seem to assume, that those producing social constructionist analyses believe that they should be the only contributors to a sociology of the environment. If the critics are concerned that social constructionism alone offers insufficient insights into environmental problems then a logical response is for them to continue to contribute alternative perspectives. The environment, in common with other topics of interest to sociologists can be approached in numerous ways, and debate and understanding about it will benefit from the inclusion of a variety of approaches.

The Social Construction of Environmental Problems and of the Environment

Realist environmental sociologists berate social constructionists for not accepting the objective existence of environmental problems or appreciating their severity. However there
is often no scientific consensus about the 'objective nature' of environmental problems, so it is far from straightforward for sociologists simply to accept scientists' pronouncements and concentrate on the social causes and effects of problems. They often have to decide which scientific position to accept and it is unclear on what grounds this can be done. Furthermore as social constructionist studies of the science of environmental change have shown (Hart & Victor 1993, Mazur and Lee 1993, Boehmer-Christianson 1994, Herrick and Jamieson 1995) scientific consensus can itself be regarded as socially constructed or actively produced and is not simply the outcome of indisputable 'facts'.

In addition even if sociologists are concerned with the 'reality' of environmental problems accepting those currently on the scientific, media, or public agendas as those worthy of sociological attention is problematic. As the review above has demonstrated there are important social, political, institutional and cultural factors behind the promotion of particular problems and relative neglect of others - those given the most attention are not necessarily those that will be seen to be the most damaging at a later date.

Critics such as Murphy (1994) reprimand social constructionists for ignoring 'nature' and 'the environment' as though the concepts were unproblematic. Social constructionist studies illustrate that this is not the case. Shoenfeld's at al's (1979) focus on the evolution of the terminology of 'environment' in the US press has already been mentioned. Tester (1994) is less concerned with the terminology and more interested in how the meaning of 'environment' and 'nature' have changed. He notes that a serious concern with the environment is restricted to certain times and places and has been particularly evident in advanced capitalist states since the 1960s. His task is to specify the nature of the affinity between advanced capitalist arrangements and the notion of 'environment'. What he proposes is that:

the environment is a category which stands...specifically as the negation of the category of technology (ibid:6)

As technology has come to be seen as increasingly powerful and mysterious with the potential to take on what can be experienced as a subjective life of its own, so the category of 'the environment' has emerged as a direct counter to it. He suggest that while the category of nature is socially constructed as passive:
the category of the environment implies a re-definition of nature as something in and for itself. (ibid:14)

Greider and Grakovitch (1994) also address the social construction of nature and the environment. Their interest is in how people 'transform the world that is there into meaningful subjective phenomena' (p4), how the same field, river or rock comes to be seen differently to and mean different things to different groups:

The open field is the same physical thing, but it carries multiple symbolic meanings that emanate from the values by which people define themselves. The real estate developer, the farmer, the hunter are definitions of who people are, and the natural environment - the physical entity of the open field - is transformed symbolically to reflect these self definitions. (ibid:1)

What these rather different analyses of the social construction of the environment indicate is that the identification of 'nature' or 'the environment' as having certain characteristics, and being important in and for itself is the result of social construction and interpretation.

For social constructionists the argument that we should be concerned about the environment, or care for nature is a claim to be explained like any other. Realist environmental sociologists object particularly to this as illustrated particularly by the fierce criticisms made by Benton (1994) and Martell (1994) of Tester's (1991) argument about animal rights that:

it is misplaced and not very useful to think that the truth of animals exists 'out there', waiting to be directly and unproblematically appreciated...animal rights is a social construction and exclusively a social practice. (ibid:194)

The problem is that environmental sociologists are engaged in a practical moral and political project to draw attention to human mistreatment of the environment (including animals). If environmental sociologists are understood as part of the environmental movement (as their concern to attend to the causes and consequences of environmental problems would suggest) then their antipathy to social constructionism can be understood more easily. Yearley (1991) notes that the environmental movement sees its claims as being grounded in facts in contrast to the claims of other movements (e.g for life or peace), and so to examine their 'claims' seems irrelevant and irresponsible. He also notes that environmental activists tend to argue that those who are not contributing to the solution are part of the problem, and this too characterises well the response of environmental
sociologists to those pursuing social constructionist analyses.

**The Usefulness of Social Constructionist Analyses**

Related to the criticism that social constructionist approaches ignore the reality of environmental problems is the perception that they are overly theoretical and hence of little practical use. However although constructionist studies concentrate on questions such as why the environment has become an issue of concern, or why some issues rather than others attract media and public attention, these questions are by no means of exclusively theoretical interest. In drawing attention to the social cultural and institutional factors that underpin the environmental agenda they address (if implicitly) practical questions such as: the factors which contribute to campaigning success (Yearley), the factors which inform whether an issue receives media attention (Schoenfeld, Hanson, Gamson & Modigliani), the factors which influence public responses to media and expert claims (Burgess and Harrison), the factors which lead to some risks being emphasised while others are downplayed (Tierney), the appropriate methodologies for understanding public perceptions of environmental threats (Gamson and Modigliani) and the relationship between scientific research and environmental policy (Herrick and Jamieson). These may be different questions from those which their more realist critics would choose to address, but they clearly advance sociological understanding of environmental issues and provide insights which could be practically applied (for instance in designing campaigning strategies or developing better forms of risk assessment).

Those producing constructionist studies of environmental issues tend to steer clear of making such practical applications explicit, wary perhaps of falling into the trap of which Spector and Kitsuse warn, of leaving the analyst’s role behind and joining with participants in making claims. In order to try and produce a rigorous constructionist account it is necessary to attempt to maintain a position of indifference to the truth status of participants’ claims - however this does not mean that such analyses have no practical use.

The few studies of environmental issues that do attempt a stricter form of constructionism (e.g. Tester’s (1994) which explicitly questions the ‘reality’ of environmental problems or the notion of ‘environment’ itself), may be described correctly as having no immediate,
obvious practical application. However this is not sufficient grounds on which to dismiss them. Theoretical considerations and critiques of notions that might be assumed to be unproblematic comprise an important part of sociology.

In addition, to dismiss a study as having no practical application is to adopt an overly simplistic notion of the way in which research is used. The relationship between sociological research and policy or practice is a complex one. Few studies have immediate practical implications, and of those which do few can be demonstrated to directly affect policy and practice. Bartley (1996) considers the relationship between sociological research and social policy as a social problems process in just the way that Hart and Victor conceptualise the development of scientific research programmes on global warming. The relationship between research and policy is not simply that research leads to changes in policy, the influence is often in the other direction with research developing in areas in which policy makers are clearly interested. In addition whether research findings get taken up by policy makers is dependent on a range of social factors.

Social research is a cumulative process, and the contributions of theoretical work inform more applied and practical projects which may in turn influence practice. These applications are often not apparent at the outset and may not even be deemed desirable. However to argue against research on the grounds that it is 'too sociological' and not practical enough is potentially to deprive the discipline of intellectual growth and stimulation, and of the development of new directions and approaches.

Conclusion
This chapter has aimed to provided an introduction to the debate about whether a sociology of environmental issues should adopt a realist or a social constructionist stance. Examples of studies using both perspectives have been outlined, and the realist critique of social constructionist studies rebuffed on a number of fronts. Social constructionist analyses of environmental issues comprise an important and insightful contribution to the sociology of the environment.

This contribution can be expanded by extending the approach to consider the study of the
social impacts of new developments. Catton and Dunlap (1979) characterise work in social impact assessment as one sub-area within environmental sociology. As the previous chapter illustrated, to date this sub-area has been little informed by sociology. Where research is explicitly informed by sociological theories or concepts this tends to rely on either functionalism (See p21-22) or the environmental sociology of Dunlap and Catton (e.g. Taylor et al 1992). This general absence of sociological insight, and adoption of realist approaches is not surprising given that SIA is a practical endeavour. However as indicated in Chapter 1 a recurrent theme in the literature is the need to pay more attention to the viewpoints of those likely to be affected by developments, and to understand more about the process and experience of impact (see for instance Gold 1978, Rohe 1982, Jessen 1980, Cooper 1981, Disanto 1981). There is space here for research which puts aside the practical aims of assessing impacts or directly contributing to methodologies for assessment, and concentrates instead on better understanding the process of social impact and members responses to, and claims about it. Social constructionism provides a ideal approach for such work. It offers a way of exploring questions such as how some things get identified and responded to as impacts while others do not, and which factors inform claims making about impacts. The analysis that is generated may deliberately eschew any practical commitment to the identification or amelioration of impacts, and need not evaluate the validity of the claims made about impacts. However by contributing to an understanding of how social impacts are socially constructed insights and implications for practice may arise.
Chapter 4

Road Building: Background and the Case Studies

Introduction

The research carried out for this thesis comprises two case studies of debates about trunk road schemes. Because both studies were undertaken as funded research projects, not all of the issues raised or data collected during those studies will be considered in the thesis. The first study took place during the planning of a stretch of the A27 of approximately six miles between Lancing and Worthing in West Sussex, and was carried out between September 1990 and September 1991. This research was commissioned by the Department of Transport (DoT) via their consultants, Acer Consultants Ltd (Acer), and aimed to assess the likely social impact of alternative routes. As part of the social impact study interviews were conducted and documents collected in order to gain access to local responses to the plans, with particular attention being paid to anticipated impacts. The second study took place five years after a section of road had been completed and was carried out between October 1991 and January 1994. This study was funded by the ESRC and explored the relationship between the impacts anticipated by local people during the planning stages and those they experienced as problematic once the road was operational. The road considered in this second study was also part of the A27; a stretch of approximately eight miles between Havant in Hampshire and Chichester in West Sussex.

The second study involved more extensive social research than the first one. This is both because of the time scale (two years and three months for the second, one year for the first) and because of the constraints imposed by consultancy work. The research carried out for Acer comprised part of their environmental impact assessment of alternative routes for the A27, and as such was an essentially practical project. In addition, as with many SIAs (see p16) the engineers commissioning the research largely determined the scope and content of the SIA, with the result that much of the work carried out, although useful for their purposes, is of limited sociological interest. In contrast the ESRC project allowed much greater freedom in terms of research design and data collection. As a result this thesis is
based mostly on research carried out during the ESRC project although the Acer project also generated some useful and interesting data.

This chapter begins by outlining the wider context of road building policy in the UK, the process of planning and consulting about the line of a proposed road and criticisms of the process, before returning to the case studies and providing a history of each and information about research methods used and data collected.

**Road Building in the UK**

*Assessing the Need for New Roads*

Adams (1981:129) describes the planning of road schemes as a sequence in which a highly generalised concept of need is progressively refined into a highly specific construction project. The DoT assess *national need on the basis of traffic and car ownership forecasts* while pressure from the public, MPs and Local Authorities may be instrumental in establishing the need for particular stretches of road (DoT 1994:231).

Adams (1981, 1990) explains that the need for new roads is assessed on the basis of road traffic forecasts. These forecasts are based on forecasts of car ownership per capita, distance travelled per car and population. Of these most importance is attached to forecasts of car ownership. The DoT's method of forecasting ownership assumes that ultimately every household will own *at least one car and 85% of all households will have two or more cars* (Adams 1990:136). The 1989 White Paper *Roads for Prosperity* predicted faster traffic growth than previous forecasts, estimating that traffic would increase by between 83% (if the economy grew at a rate of 2% per year) and 134% (if the economy grew at a rate of 3% per year) by the year 2025, compared with 1988. In 1990 there were about 18m cars in Britain, and the DoT’s model anticipates that there will be 38m by 2025. These figures were used to justify a greatly expanded programme of road building.

Adams (1981, 1990) provides a varied critique of the way in which the DoT forecasts traffic growth. He draws attention to the uncertainty inherent in forecasting, and the problem of assuming that future behaviour will mirror that of the past. With regard to car ownership he is particularly critical of the DoT’s failure to consider the way in which
environmental and social considerations may affect the forecasts. He argues that resource shortages may lead to increased fuel costs which will in turn affect traffic, and suggests that the environmental and social impacts of increased traffic should be considered in the forecasting process. He points out that:

The extra future traffic...is entirely hypothetical. It is traffic that would materialise only if future travellers were not confronted with the social and environmental costs of their travel. (1981:150)

The environmental costs he draws attention to are resource depletion, pollution (which has both local and global consequences) and the depletion of land. In terms of social costs he focuses on the problems for those who do not have cars, especially children and the elderly who experience greater danger on the roads and often a subsequent loss of independence. His main argument is that:

The rising tide of car ownership is not an irresistible force of nature over which governments have no control...there is nothing inevitable about the continued growth of car ownership. (1990:141)

The DoT's methods of forecasting traffic growth have also been criticised by several Government committees. The Report of the Committee on Trunk Roads Assessment (commonly known as the Leitch Report), published in October 1977, was critical of the Department's cost benefit methodology and of the obscurity of the forecast models which it employed. It recommended that the degree of uncertainty intrinsic to traffic forecasts should be made clear and that the Department should ensure that its methods were made comprehensible to ordinary people. In 1984 the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment (SACTRA) was given the task of assessing the traffic, environmental, economic and other effects of urban road improvements. Their report was published in 1986 and expressed concern about the way in which the DoT develops, assesses and justifies major schemes and about the complexity and obscurity of the process. The DoT's forecasts have recently come under renewed criticism with the publication in 1994 of another SACTRA report, Trunk Roads and the Generation of Traffic. This report addressed the question of whether new or improved trunk roads induce extra traffic and concluded that they did. This conclusion caused some embarrassment to the DoT who had consistently denied this assertion (Hamer 1995).
The Planning Process

Once the national need for new roads has been estimated the next stages are to identify broad route corridors and then to prepare 'Stage 1 Scheme Identification Studies' which identify possible routes for new roads and assess their feasibility. If it is decided that a route is feasible it enters the road programme, consulting engineers are appointed and alternative routes investigated in some detail (Stage 2 Assessment). There follows a stage of public consultation. Exhibitions of the route proposals are staged and the Stage 1 and Stage 2 assessment reports made available to the public. Questionnaires are distributed inviting the public to submit their views on the options presented and suggest any alternatives.

The results of the public consultation are then combined with the Stage 2 assessment and a decision made on the DoT’s preferred route. This preferred route is then announced and detailed design work begins. Stage 3 assessment involves identifying clearly all the advantages and disadvantages of the preferred route in compliance with the 1985 EC directive on environmental assessment. When the scheme details are finalised the draft orders are published providing details of the line of the road, alterations to side roads and land and property to be compulsorily purchased. The proposal is advertised in the local press and occupiers of houses close to or on the line are notified individually. The plans are made available for public inspection and exhibitions mounted explaining them in detail. Objections to the proposals are invited from the public and if any are received a public inquiry is held.

Public Inquiries

The Report on the Review of Highway Inquiry Procedures produced by the Departments of Transport and the Environment defines the role of the Public Inquiry as follows:

The purpose of the public inquiry is to inform the Secretaries of state for Transport and the Environment of the weight and nature of objections to a road scheme. The key tasks of the Inspector are to take account of objections from people affected by the proposals; to report on those objections; and to make recommendations to the Secretaries of State for Transport and the Environment on the proposals. The ultimate decision is not the Inspector’s; it is one which the two Secretaries of State take jointly, in the light of representations and objections, the Inspector’s report, and all relevant aspects of the Government’s policies. (1978:3)
The Report stresses that the Public Inquiry is only part of a 'complex and lengthy process' leading up to the building of a new road, but concedes that it is a 'very important part'. Wynne explains that the public inquiry has this important status as it is the sole formal setting for public conflict about technological developments (1982:52). For the public it is the focal point of the planning process, the arena in which they can voice their objections or support for the proposed scheme and receive a direct response from the planners. As the extract above indicates the Inquiry is not a judicial proceeding. The inspector is not judge of the cases for and against development, his (it usually is a man) is primarily a 'fact' gathering exercise.

Research stretching back to the 1960s has branded the public inquiry system as a 'farce' (Levin 1969), a 'charade' (Self 1970) and a 'fraud' (Cowan 1980). Criticism reached a peak in the 1970s when objectors led by John Tyme successfully disrupted several inquiries into road schemes. The objectors claimed that inquiries were unfair, cast doubt on the Department’s forecasting methods, argued that the public received insufficient information about the proposals and claimed that inquiries should address the issue of whether the project should take place at all. The growing controversy over methods of assessing the need for a new road and the fairness of public inquiries was reflected in the publication of two Government Reports. The recommendations of the Leitch Report (1977) that methods of assessment should be made more straightforward and understandable to the public have been outlined above. It was followed in April 1978 by the Report on the Review of Highway Inquiry Procedures (RRHIP). The RRHIP introduced a number of changes to the public inquiry process with the aim of restoring confidence in the fairness of the system. More information was to be supplied to objectors before and during the inquiry, Inspectors were to be nominated by the Lord Chancellor not the Secretaries of State as previously and alternative routes of near equal merit were to be assessed alongside the Department’s preferred scheme. However as Cullingworth notes, ‘these measures have not lived up to expectations’ (1985:318) and criticism of the system continues (see for instance Monbiot 1995).

The recurrent criticisms made of the inquiry system are first, that the Department’s mind is made up before the inquiry and thus the process is merely cosmetic. A number of
writers have suggested that inquiries are concerned with maintaining the appearance of consultation, rather than actually ensuring real public participation (Wynne 1982, Hutton 1986). Another criticism is that the process is fundamentally unfair as the proposers of a development are the judge of their own proposals. Despite the transferral of responsibility for appointing Inspectors from the Secretaries of State to the Lord Chancellor, concern about fairness persists. This is largely because even if the Inspector finds in favour of the objectors and recommends major alterations or the abandonment of the Department’s scheme, the Secretaries of State for Transport and the Environment retain the final decision and are able to overrule the Inspector’s recommendations. Inquiries are also widely considered to be weighted against members of the public who wish to object to the Department’s plans. Objectors are said to lack the resources of time, money and expertise necessary to provide an effective criticism of the Department’s case. A further criticism is that transport policy issues and concerns about its environmental and social consequences are deemed irrelevant and inappropriate for discussion at public inquiries - only local issues and the particular stretch of road being considered may be debated at each inquiry. Tyme (1978) argues that this allows the DoT to build a road network 'by stealth' as a road is never considered in its entirety, let alone the entire roads programme.

Following the inquiry the inspector submits his conclusions and recommendations to the Secretary of State for Transport. The Secretaries of State for Transport and the Environment make a decision on the basis of this report and if they decide to proceed with the scheme the orders are made, contract documents drawn up and tenders to build the road invited.

The whole process from inception to completion of construction takes an average of twelve to fifteen years. The DoT note that while the construction stage has become shorter due to technological and engineering advances, the planning stages have become lengthier with the inclusion of public consultation and 'the greater political involvement which is in evidence these days' (DoT notes for Training for Public Inquiries, Development and Purpose of Public Inquiry System p3, 3.4).

Policy
In the UK the Government is responsible for the planning and maintenance of trunk roads and motorways while local authorities are responsible for local roads. Throughout the 1980s the Conservative Government’s policy for roads prioritised the building of roads to aid economic development, improve the environment (particularly by bypassing towns and villages), making roads safer and preserving existing investment by repairing and maintaining existing roads (*Policy for Roads: England 1980, Policy for Roads in England 1983, Roads for Prosperity 1989*). The 1989 White Paper (*Roads for Prosperity*) laid out a greatly expanded motorway and trunk road programme to relieve the congestion which the Government considered to be 'bad for the economy' (1989:1). Commitment to private over public transport and to the use of cars in particular was apparent in the simultaneous direction of public resources to improving and increasing the infrastructure of roads while privatising the railways and deregulating bus services.

This policy has come under sustained and varied criticism from academics (Adams 1981, 1990, Adams & Hillman 1992), media sources and most vividly in direct action against proposed new roads. Although direct action had been used to disrupt public inquiries into road schemes in the 1970s, the nature and scale of protest in the 1990s is qualitatively different. The movement began with protest against the planned extension of the M23 through Twyford Down in Hampshire, which involved local people and outsiders in massive demonstrations and disruption of the road building process. Protestors emphasised the importance of non-violent protest. Methods such as chaining themselves to construction machinery and sit down protests were used to halt construction and draw attention to the effects of the road on the countryside. Following Twyford Down other protests have occurred throughout the UK, notably against the Batheaston bypass across Solsbury hill near Bath, the M11 in Wanstead and Leyton in East London, the M65 in Lancashire, the M77 near Glasgow and the A34 Newbury bypass. All have received extensive media coverage. These protests all drew attention to the effects of the particular road on the locality - whether in terms of the destruction of countryside or of homes - but also raised wider concerns. These are not only about the roads programme and transport policy more generally, but also about the lack of opportunities for meaningful participation in planning decisions and about the importance of conserving and protecting the countryside. A basic criticism is that the assumption that building new roads will ease congestion is flawed, and
that building new roads will simply encourage more people to make car journeys. Environmental objections encompass concern about the effects on residential areas in terms of aesthetics or health, about the loss of valued countryside, trees and wildlife and about the wider environmental implications of a reliance on transport by motor vehicles which use finite resources and emit pollutants. Further objections draw attention to the cost of building new roads suggesting that the money could be better spent elsewhere, and point to the consequences on those without cars, the increased danger for pedestrians and cyclists, the loss of homes to make way for roads and the division of communities by them.

In 1994 the Department of Transport published a review of its roads policy (Trunk Roads in England) which was widely taken to represent a U-turn in policy. This document reasserted the Government’s commitment to reducing congestion and announced the aim of ensuring that the time taken to implement important developments should be shortened. In order to do this a system was introduced which identified the schemes to be given priority. Forty nine schemes were withdrawn from the programme on the grounds that they could not achieve an acceptable environmental balance or they were unlikely to be progressed for the foreseeable future. (1994:3)

Those withdrawn included both planned major new routes and 'improvements' to existing routes. Although the DoT justified these changes in terms of attending to urgently needed schemes more efficiently the media interpreted them as a significant change in policy and declared that the Government were 'giv(ing) in to the demands of campaigners' (Wolmar 1994). Two other reports published in 1994 supported the need for further changes in policy. In October the Royal Commission on environmental pollution produced a report arguing that there is a need for:

a gradual shift away from lifestyles which depend on high mobility and intensive use of cars (Royal Commission p233)

on the grounds that a continuing increase in road traffic is neither socially nor environmentally acceptable. Also published in 1994 was SACTRA’s report Trunk Roads and the Generation of Traffic which, as outlined above, cast doubt on the DoT’s claims that building new roads eased congestion - the basic rationale of the roads programme. This encouraged critics to believe that the tide was finally turning, and the environmental transport group Transport 2000 hailed it as a 'watershed in the transport debate' (Smithers
1994). The impression that a subtle shift in policy was taking place was confirmed by further cuts to the roads programme in 1995, and the publication in 1996 of the Green paper *Transport: The Way Forward*. In this the Government recognised growing public concern about the environmental impacts of transport and acknowledged:

that a change of emphasis is needed, towards recognising the long term consequences of high traffic growth (p12)

Conservative policy throughout the 1980s and early 1990s was thus characterised by a commitment to road building. This policy now seems to be shifting, and many take this change to be the result of persistent and effective campaigning against the roads programme. However critics question whether the changes are the result of a genuine commitment to improving environmental conditions or simply a cost saving exercise. Government commitment to public transport is viewed as little more than rhetoric as bus and train services have almost all been privatised (Guardian 26/4/96), and the response to direct action against proposed new roads indicates continuing commitment to road building even in the face of mass public opposition.

The Case Studies

The Area

Both case studies were carried out in the South East of England, the Acer study within West Sussex, and the ESRC study in an area around the West Sussex-Hampshire border. Both study areas can broadly be described as largely middle class. In both Worthing and Chichester over 50% of economically active households are classified as belonging to the first three of the Registrar General’s social classes (1991 Census County Report for West Sussex), although the roads in question pass through or close to both middle class and more working class areas. Both areas are predominantly white; Worthing has only 1.5% of its population classified as belonging to ethnic groups other than white, while Chichester has 0.9% and Emsworth just 0.6%. The majority of residents own their own homes - 76% in Worthing, 74% in Lancing, 70% in the Chichester area and 80% in Emsworth. In common with much of the south coast the area has a high concentration of elderly people. For instance 30% of Worthing’s population and 26% of both Chichester’s and Emsworth’s are of pensionable age, compared with a national percentage of around 16% (Social Trends 1996).
Maps of the case study areas and of the main proposed routes are provided as appendices.

In neither of the case studies was there any serious opposition during the planning process to the proposal to build a new road. Debate centred on what route the roads should take.¹

**The A27 Worthing/Lancing**

The existing A27 between west of Worthing and east of Lancing is used as a local road as well as providing part of an east-west route for longer distance traffic. It is mainly a single carriage road and has many junctions along it. The road passes through some suburban areas with houses adjacent to the road, and also crosses farmland between Worthing and Sompting. At the Public Inquiry into the road scheme in 1993, Acer, the consultants for the DoT, concluded that the road was deficient in terms of alignment, carriageway width and number of junctions, with the result that traffic speeds were low causing vehicle delays, increased pollution and a higher risk of accidents compared to a trunk road designed to current standards.

The proposal to ‘improve’ the A27 was first seriously investigated in the early 1970s. In 1972 consultant engineers, L.G. Mouchel and Partners, were commissioned to design and assess routes for the road. In 1977 the Secretary of State announced a preferred route on the basis of their work, this route largely following the line of the existing road through Worthing from the west up to the A24, and then passing to the north of the residential areas of East Worthing and Lancing. This route is more or less the one that was finally brought to public inquiry in 1993.

The process of approving the route was lengthy largely because the road was removed from the trunk road programme in 1980 as its cost could not be justified at the time. In 1985 it was reinstated in the programme and Howard Humphreys and Partners (HHP) were

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¹ During the Worthing Inquiry a group called Worthing Against Motorways (WAM) demonstrated and gave out leaflets entitled ‘Mad Car Disease’ which claimed that ‘roads are a senseless waste of finite resources’ and promoting investment in public transport. Their position was very marginal in the debate about the road, but reflects the emergence of a national anti-road movement.
commissioned to prepare a new study of possible routes. HHP employed a range of methods of public consultation to gauge local route preferences. First they conducted a 'blank map' exercise, in which members of the public were supplied with maps of the area and asked to indicate the route they would favour for an improvement of the road. The results were used to identify the range of routes with most support, and a second exercise carried out in which people were asked which of these routes they preferred. The results of both these exercises indicated that within Worthing preference was split roughly half and half between those who wanted an on-line route of the sort originally proposed by Mouchel, and those who wanted to see Worthing bypassed to the north. In Lancing and Sompting the majority of residents wanted to see that section of the road bypassing the residential area.

In 1989 the Secretary of State announced that what was known as the 'Green Route' - on-line through Worthing and bypassing Lancing - was the DoT’s preferred route. Acer Consultants Ltd were appointed to carry out the final design and assessment. The Public Inquiry into the route opened on 28 September 1993 and ran until 24 August 1994. The inspector was Mr. Peter Leveridge. Throughout the planning and assessment of the road local debate centred on the choice between an on-line route and a bypass. Opposition to an on-line route was based on the fact that it would require the demolition of over 90 homes and would have an unacceptable impact on the urban environment of Worthing, while opposition to the bypass route focused on the effect that route would have on the countryside of the South Downs. At the time of writing the Inspector’s report has not been published and no decisions have yet been made by the Secretaries of State. A recent article in a local newspaper (The Worthing Herald 21/6/96) claimed that local people were still unclear when the inspector’s report would be published, and were becoming frustrated by the long wait.

The A27 Havant/Chichester

The proposal to construct a relief road between Havant and Chichester was first agreed by the County Councils of Hampshire and West Sussex in 1937 and with minor amendments this proposal featured in all the county development plans produced since then. In July 1972 a draft scheme was published based on the line proposed in 1937. At this stage the intention was that the road would form a new section of the M27 south coast motorway.
Many objections from local people were received in response to this proposal, the majority expressing concern about its effects in the Fishbourne area. It was decided to review the scheme and at the same time to take account of the wider powers of compensation provided by the Land Compensation Act of 1973.

It was also around this time that the DoT introduced a new non-statutory procedure of public consultation which enabled the public to comment at an earlier stage than previously in the planning of road schemes. It was decided that this opportunity should be given in respect of the Havant-Chichester proposals and so the DoT withdrew the draft scheme and in 1974 issued a consultation document inviting the public's comment on three possible routes. The road was still proposed as a motorway. One of the options was a new route to the north of Chichester and the other two were variations of the originally published route connecting to the existing bypass south of Chichester. The consultation document included a questionnaire in which people were invited to state their choice of route and give reasons for their preference. Public exhibitions were held in Chichester and Emsworth where people could examine detailed plans and discuss the scheme with DoT officials.

As a result of the consultation exercise 1,341 questionnaires were completed and comments were received from local authorities and organisations. The old A27 (now the A259) was a narrow single carriageway road which twisted through the hearts of a number of villages and was heavily congested. Local people had expressed concern about the noise and pollution the road caused in the villages, about danger to pedestrians, about effects on house prices in what would otherwise be a very desirable area and about the length of time it took to drive between Havant and Chichester. Consequently the plans to build a new road met with almost universal approval although there was some disagreement about where exactly it should be located. The majority of questionnaires returned favoured the northern route, but strong arguments against the selection of this route were also advanced. West Sussex County Council (WSCC) and Chichester District Council pointed out that the planning of the Chichester area had been based on the assumption of a southern route. The northern route was also opposed on the grounds that it would damage the landscape, agricultural and recreational land, and the environment in general more than the alternative. The majority of those who supported the northern route lived in the area that would be affected by a
southern route. They expressed concern about noise, pollution, demolition of property and the effects on shopping, schooling and community life.

In November 1977 the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport announced the preferred route. The route selected was the southern option described as the black/red/green route in the consultation document, except that at its eastern end it was modified slightly with the intention of reducing the effect on Fishbourne. It was announced that the road was to be constructed as an all purpose Trunk Road and not as a motorway. This decision was made on the basis of new traffic forecasts. Detailed design of the route began, and draft orders fixing the route between Havant and Chichester, de-trunking the existing A27 and providing for alterations to existing roads, footpaths and private accesses were published in February 1979. In March exhibitions of the draft orders and plans were held in Chichester and Emsworth, and were followed by an objection period. This lasted until 25th May and gave anyone affected by or concerned about the proposals an opportunity to send in objections or to submit alternative proposals for the Secretary of State to consider.

During the period 233 objections were received. Over two thirds were concerned with side road issues and the majority of the remainder were concerned with small changes to the published route. Fifty two representations were made, mainly in support of the proposal. Sixteen alternative routes were put forward for consideration. Of these five were withdrawn either before or at the inquiry, eight were local modifications to the route and the other three were major variations: route four going north of Emsworth, Westbourne, Ashling and Chichester, route five going north of Emsworth and Westbourne, and route thirteen bypassing Chichester to the North. On 11th October it was announced that a Public Inquiry was to be held in Havant commencing on 4th December. Mr D.M. Sims was appointed as the Inspector. The objectors' alternative routes were published in the local press and a further 87 objections and 234 representations were received. Over half of the further objections were in a standardised form from people in Emsworth, and the rest were mainly in support of one or more of the published routes.

The public inquiry ran for forty five days between 4th December 1979 and 1st May 1980. Objections to the DoT's route drew on a variety of concerns. It was argued particularly that
the road would divide communities, cause dangerous levels of pollution for children in local schools and be visually intrusive. The inspector concluded that route four was preferable to the Department’s proposals, and thus he was ‘unable to recommend that the draft orders be made’ (Inspectors’ Report p229). However he presented his conclusions on the minor route variation proposals, believing that:

> action in accordance with my conclusions on these variations and amendments would result in proposals that could be recommended were it not for the preferred alternative route 4 (Ibid)

The Secretaries of State’s decision made on the basis of the Inspector’s report was not published until February 1982. They decided to reject the Inspector’s recommendation that the orders should not be made, and to accept his recommendation that his conclusions on the published proposals should form the basis for modifications and amendments to the draft orders. It was noted that the promotion of route four would mean a delay of at least three to four years and that there was almost unanimous agreement about the urgent need to relieve the existing A27. They accepted that route four would have certain advantages, but believed that these would be outweighed by its disadvantages compared to the preferred route: the reduced effectiveness of relief to the existing A27, the further long delay in producing relief and other benefits expected from the new road, the departure from the long-established development plan line and the further substantial period of blight and uncertainty over a wide area. Plans showing the modifications were made available for interested parties, and representations on the proposed modifications invited.

Eighteen months later in August 1983 the Secretaries of State announced that the route was fixed between Hambrook and Chichester and made line order and side road orders for this section. However their decision had been deferred on proposals for the route west of Hambrook Hill. One of the modifications published in 1982 had been a southern shift in the road towards Southbourne away from properties in Westbourne and Woodmancote. Residents of Southbourne had objected to this and the DoT decided to move the line of the road back to the line originally proposed in 1979/80. This meant that the Inspector’s recommendation for this stretch of road had been overruled and thus any potential objectors had to be given the opportunity to make representations or to call for another public inquiry. A period of twenty one days was allowed for this.
On December 6th the Secretaries of State announced that they had decided to withdraw the remaining parts of the original draft line and side roads orders and to publish fresh draft orders incorporating minor line changes at Warblington and Emsworth; and to publish draft compulsory purchase orders for the whole scheme shortly afterwards. In a DoT Press Release Mrs. Lynda Chalker, Minister of State for Transport, said:

Following the announcement of 24 August 1983 about the section of the road between the River Ems and South Lane we have received a number of requests for the inquiry to be reopened. In view of the unresolved conflict of interest between the local residents, which was not argued out at the previous inquiry, we do not consider that it would be right to make the order as previously published without giving those concerned a further opportunity to have their case considered by an independent inspector. (DoT Press Notice 6/12/83)

Objections to all outstanding draft orders would be dealt with at one public inquiry. On December 9th the new line and side road orders for the Havant to Hambrook Hill section were published, along with draft proposals for a split level interchange at the Warblington Roundabout and supplementary side road proposals on the route already fixed between Hambrook hill and Chichester. The draft orders were publicly exhibited in January and open for objection and comment until 17th February 1984.

On May 1st 1984 it was announced that a public inquiry would be held in Havant. The Inspector was to be Air Vice Marshall C.G. Maugham. On May 10th a pre-inquiry meeting was held in Havant. The official notes of the meeting record that the Inspector made it clear that it was his intention to rule that the line of the road from Hambrook to Chichester would not be open to further discussion, and that all aspects of the Havant to Hambrook section would be dealt with before proceeding with the Hambrook to Chichester issues.

The Inquiry opened on 19th June and ran until 17th July. By the time it finished 259 objections and 132 representations had been received about the Havant to Hambrook proposal and 29 objections and seven representations received about the Hambrook to Chichester proposals. Ten alternative routes were suggested by objectors, nine were local variations of the published route and one was a major alternative taking the road north of Emsworth.

In February 1985 the DoT announced that the contract for a bridge carrying the new road
over the railway at Fishbourne had been awarded to Rush and Tompkins Ltd. Work began soon after. Mrs Chalker commented:

(this) is a significant step in the progress of the improvement of the A27 between Havant and Chichester and marks our firm commitment to this important scheme. (DoT press notice 6/2/85)

A year after the inquiry was held, on 12th June 1985, the Secretaries of State published their decision to accept the Inspector’s recommendations. Overall he had found the proposals contained in the draft orders to be satisfactory and urged early construction. He concluded that the environmental advantage lay with the published route, that it would provide traffic and economic benefits and that it was to be preferred to any of the alternative routes proposed. The Secretary of State for Transport made the orders fixing the route between Havant and Hambrook and the Warblington Interchange proposals, and with minor modifications the associated side road orders. He also made the order for detrunking the existing A27 and with minor modification the supplementary side roads order on the Hambrook-Chichester Section. Compulsory Purchase Orders were made soon after for most of the land needed for the whole scheme. In August 1986 it was announced that Alfred McAlpine Ltd. had signed a £19.9m contract to build the road. Construction was to be supervised by Mott, Hay and Anderson. It was predicted that work would take two and a half year. The road was completed six months ahead of schedule and was opened on 19th August 1988 by Mr Peter Bottomley, the Minister for Roads and Traffic.

As soon as the road opened complaints began about the level and pitch of the noise generated by the concrete surface which had been used. Existing residents’ groups took up the issue and other action groups quickly formed. Protest about the noise from the road’s surface was still ongoing at the end of the data collection period (July 1993).

Data Collection

Worthing/Lancing case study

As part of the social impact assessment of routes for the A27 various data were gathered. Much of the research consisted of surveys of pedestrian movement and of use of areas of countryside, in order to estimate the effect of building each route. The data collected during these surveys will not be considered here. However semi-structured interviews were
also carried out, and the data they generated was useful for the SIA and also for this thesis.

In addition press reports were collected after the completion of the SIA during the public
inquiry period.

*Interviews*

These interviews aimed to provide a better understanding of local life, and appreciation of
the anticipated impacts of the proposed routes for the A27. Choice of respondents was
constrained by Acer who were concerned that interviewing members of the public might
complicate the planning process (see p16 for a discussion of planners' fears about public
participation). As a consequence it was agreed that a sample of local community leaders
and representatives should be approached who could be expected to provide some insight
into the social life of the area and the range of views held about the proposals.

In order to obtain a sample, planning officers in Worthing Borough Council, Adur District
Council, Arun District Council and West Sussex County Council were approached.
Worthing Borough Council provided a list of borough councillors, representatives of leisure
facilities and of local residents associations, and action groups concerned with the A27.
Adur and Arun District Councils both provided lists of district councillors and West Sussex
County Council provided a list of schools within the area. In addition a list of churches
within the area was compiled by studying a map, and the names and addresses of the clergy
responsible obtained from the church notice boards.

Between October and December 1990 letters were written requesting interviews with a total
of 45 individuals. Of these 10 were representatives of action groups or residents’
associations, 9 were clergy, 8 were local councillors, 6 were head teachers, 6 were
representatives of groups for elderly people or for young people, and 6 were representatives
of leisure facilities. Twenty one of those approached agreed to be interviewed, a further 20
did not respond to the letter, 3 people provided a written response but declined to be
interviewed, and 1 person telephoned and said that they did not want to participate in the
research. Of the 21 who agreed to be interviewed 5 were representatives of residents’ or
action groups, 4 were clergy, 4 were local councillors, 5 were head teachers, 2 were
representatives of leisure facilities and one was a representative of a group of elderly
A total of 19 interviews were carried out as two respondents decided to attend interviews arranged with other people rather than be interviewed separately.

The interviews were carried out between November 1990 and May 1991. Interviews were tailored to respondents (so for instance head-teachers were asked different questions to local councillors), however all were asked to provide details about local activities (whether that was how children travelled to school, or details of social activity within the ward) and to outline the concerns about the road held by those they represented. Respondents were encouraged to discuss issues which they thought relevant rather than being kept to a strict schedule. Interviews were of an informal nature and lasted between 30 minutes and two hours, depending on how much information the respondents wanted to offer. The majority of interviews took place in participants' homes with some including visits to areas which they claimed would be adversely affected by one of the routes. Nine of the interviews were with small groups of people, as respondents had invited others who shared their views to be present.

Notes were taken during the interviews, and 16 of those interviewed agreed to the interview being tape recorded. Of these 14 were subsequently transcribed in full as the recordings were faulty in two cases. The transcripts were coded with the Prefix W (Worthing/Lancing) and an identifying letter between A and N in order to ensure respondents' anonymity. When more than one interviewee was present individuals were distinguished with the suffix i, ii etc.

A common methodological recommendation is that attempts should be made to minimise the effect of the interview situation on respondents' answers (see Fielding 1993). This involves paying attention to interviewer effects as well as to features of the physical environment in which the interview takes place. As it is recognised that there are limits to the extent to which interview effects can be controlled, researchers are advised to provide full details of the interview context, and to acknowledge any ways in which aspects of this may have affected the accounts provided by interviewees (ibid: p145).

This recommendation is based on a conception of interviews as a tool to elicit the truth
from interviewees about some events or about their feelings, attitudes or experiences. It is assumed that a true version is available, but that this is liable to be distorted or misrepresented. This approach to interviews is problematic from a social constructionist perspective. Rather then trying to elicit the 'truth' from participants the social constructionist researcher begins from the premise that the same events, emotions or ideas can be described in a variety of ways with no version necessarily being 'truer' than the others. Thus attempts to control the interview situation to obtain unbiased data become irrelevant.

It is not that the effect of features of the interview context on the account produced are dismissed but rather that the range of factors which might shape the account produced is potentially vast. As Schegloff (1991) points out the analyst rarely has adequate grounds to conclude that a particular feature of the context, or characteristic of a participant, has influenced the data in a specific way. He notes the myriad ways in which any place or person can be correctly described and concludes that it is only those features which can be shown to be demonstrably relevant to participants themselves which should be used to characterise the situation. Thus no attempt will be made here to provide an exhaustive description of the interview context, or of individual interviewees' identity in terms of age, occupation, gender or whatever.

**Documentary Data**

Press reports were collected during the Public Inquiry (September 1993 to August 1994). Two local weekly newspapers, the *Worthing Herald* and the *West Sussex Gazette*, were subscribed to, and all articles, letters and photographs on the subject of the road scheme and the public inquiry were collected. Both newspapers carried some reports or letters about the road proposals on most of the weeks for which data were collected. Both featured special sections reporting on the progress of the inquiry. The *Worthing Herald* carried these inquiry reports on 29 of the 49 weeks for which data were collected, and the *West Sussex Gazette* on 17 weeks. These reports were marked with their own logo, and varied from one article to three page spreads incorporating photographs. In addition to these reports 15 other articles about the road appeared in the *Worthing Herald* and 20 in the *West Sussex Gazette*. During the period for which the newspapers were received 49 letters about the
proposals appeared in the *Worthing Herald* and 16 in the *West Sussex Gazette*.

**Havant/Chichester Case Study**

For the ESRC project three methods of data collection were employed: the collection of documents relating to the scheme, interviews with people involved in the debate about the road, and a survey of those living alongside it. The combination of these three distinct approaches allowed a comprehensive picture to be built up of the history of the scheme and its effects. It also allowed comparisons to be made between accounts of impact made in different fora (for instance the official accounts provided by the DoT and the accounts provided by local campaigners). In this thesis analysis will concentrate mainly on the documentary and interview data.

**Documentary Data**

West Sussex County Council and Hampshire County Council provided access to data such as files of press cuttings about the planning of the road, the reports of the two public inquiries into the road scheme, various maps and plans, press releases, objectors' submissions to the public inquiries\(^2\) and DoT memoranda about the scheme. These documentary data were used primarily as background information in developing an understanding of the issues before the interviewing phase. However the objectors' submissions to the first public inquiry were also analyzed alongside the interview material. All of the submissions which Surrey County Council had from representatives of groups objecting to the scheme were collected - a total of 19. The submissions were numbered for reference in the public inquiry and the original numbers are maintained in this thesis, except where objectors made multiple submissions - in these cases the submissions have been given the suffix a, b,c.

Documentary data about local responses to impacts as the road became operational were obtained from local newspaper reports. A search was carried out in a micro-film archive of copies of the *Chichester Observer*, the local weekly newspaper, for the period January

\(^2\) Those wishing to object to aspects of the proposals at the public inquiry must submit their case in writing.
1988 (seven months before the road opened) to July 1993. The *Chichester Observer* has sister papers, the daily *News* and the weekly *West Sussex Gazette*, that are published by the same proprietor. However these carried fewer but similar articles on the road and were therefore not also searched. Articles from the *Chichester Observer* that related to the road and its impact were photocopied. During this period a total of 151 articles appeared about the A27, most of them (60%) dealing with the development and organisation of the protest about noise.

**Interviews**

Interviewees were selected by three methods. First, active participants during the public inquiry phase were identified from the documentary data, secondly, key players in the ongoing debate about the scheme were identified from press reports and finally those who agreed to be interviewed were asked to recommend others whom it would be relevant to interview. A total of 38 individuals were eventually approached for interview.

Twenty four of those approached agreed to be interviewed, 10 people did not respond to the letter, one person provided a written response but declined to be interviewed and three refused to be interviewed. Of the 24 interviewed 7 were local councillors, 6 were representatives of groups who objected at the public inquiries, 4 were representatives of action groups formed to campaign about the noise generated from the road, and the others were people who had had their homes compulsorily purchased (2 people), representatives of the DoT (2 people), the inquiry inspector, a local vicar, and somebody whose house was particularly badly affected by noise. There was some overlap between these categories of interviewee, for instance two of the local councillors interviewed turned out also to be active members of one of the residents' groups. All interviews were with individuals, except for one which was with two people. One indication that the sample of informants was adequate is that no respondent suggested that anyone who was not in the sample was an important source of information and opinion.

The interviews were conducted between August 1992 and January 1993. The format was informal and semi-structured. As in the Worthing/Lancing study interviews were tailored to respondents (for instance those who were involved in the inquiry phase were asked about
this in detail), but all covered the respondents’ attitudes towards the proposal to build the road and concern at that stage, and then moved on to ask about their perception of the impacts of the road since its construction. Respondents were encouraged to discuss issues which they thought relevant rather than being kept to a strict schedule. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and two hours, depending on how much information the respondents wanted to offer. The methodological considerations discussed in relation to the Worthing/Lancing interviews (p79-80) apply equally to the Havant/Chichester data.

Notes were taken during the interviews, and all but one (the engineers responsible for the road’s construction) agreed to the interview being tape recorded. In two instances the recording failed. Those successfully recorded were transcribed in full, giving a total of 21 transcripts. These were coded with the prefix H (Havant/Chichester) and an identifying letter between A and U. When more than one interviwee was present individuals were distinguished with the suffix i, ii etc.

Survey
A survey of a sample of the population who live near to the road was undertaken to assess their perceptions of, and gauge their reactions to it. The population of interest was defined as those living at the properties listed in the DoT consultants’ schedule of properties affected by the Noise Insulation Regulations 1988. This listed 406 properties situated within 300m of the centre line of the road. As the survey was not an attempt to represent the views of the entire population of the area, but to obtain descriptive information about those who lived particularly close to the road, it was decided to approach the residents of all the listed properties.

The list of affected properties only identified addresses. However it was considered that a better response rate would be obtained if questionnaires were sent to named individuals, so the names of residents at the properties were obtained from the relevant electoral rolls. Some of the properties did not appear on the electoral roll and others proved to be residential care homes. Consequently the final list consisted of 378 properties. Where a couple were resident at a property questionnaires were sent to both individuals. This was to avoid obtaining a response dominated by men as seemed likely to occur if questionnaires
were sent to 'heads of households'. 512 individuals were identified at the 378 properties. A response was obtained from 322 individuals spread over 244 properties, giving a response rate by property of 65%, and an individual rate of 63%.

For the ESRC project the data were analyzed using SPSS, but these results will not be discussed here (for a discussion of the survey results see Burningham 1995). However the questionnaire provided opportunities for respondents to provide written accounts of their perception of and reactions to the road, and these comprise part of the data analyzed in this thesis.

**Conclusion**

In the following chapters the data collected during the two case studies will be used to explore the social construction of the social impacts of the roads. The data relied upon most is that gathered in the interviews. In neither study was any attempt made to obtain a representative sample of the local population for interview, rather the goal was to reach representatives of the local community (in the Worthing/Lancing study) and key players in the debate about the road (in the Havant/Chichester study). The relatively small number of interviews obtained is sufficient given the detailed qualitative methods of analysis employed.

With the Worthing/Lancing study the constraints placed on those who could be approached raises some doubts about the representativeness of the views accessed. Although the sample contained people from a variety of areas within Worthing/Lancing, and with a range of opinions about the proposed scheme, it would have been desirable to speak to some of those likely to be directly affected by the scheme rather than just to 'representatives' of these people. Overall the sample from Worthing is rather small (19 interviews). It is likely that the response rate was affected by the fact that the research was part of the official SIA commissioned by the DoT, and some people may have been wary or sceptical of participating in this process. In addition the interviews were carried out during a lull in the process of planning for the road - the DoT had announced their recommended route a year previously, and the Public Inquiry was not scheduled for another three years. If interviews had been conducted closer to the time of the Public Inquiry it is likely that more people
would have had something to say about the likely impacts of the road and would have agreed to be interviewed.

Although the sample of interviews obtained for the Havant/Chichester study is also relatively small (24 interviews) the sampling method used in this study (identifying people through documentary sources and personal recommendation) ensured that all those considered locally to be (or to have been) active in the debate were approached. As with the Worthing/Lancing study the sample suffers from the problem of including mostly those who have been active in debate about the road, who may differ from those affected on a day by day basis. However the survey provided access to the latter and confirmed that their appraisal of the impacts was broadly similar to that gained from the interviews. All agreed that the major impact of the road was the noise generated by its surface
Chapter 5

The Social Construction of the Impact of Noise

Introduction
This chapter and the following one focus on the social construction of noise as a significant impact of the A27 Havant/Chichester. As soon as the road opened complaints began to be made by local people about the noise generated by its concrete surface. Existing residents' groups took up the issue and new action groups and alliances were formed to tackle the problem. At the time of data collection protest about the noise and campaigning to get the road resurfaced was ongoing. In this chapter analysis will focus on two questions: why did any protest emerge, and why was it specifically about noise? The following chapter will consider interviewees' claims about the impact of noise in some detail and address the question of how noise was constructed as a real and significant impact.

Background - Noise as the most significant impact
During the planning phase of the road local people claimed that a range of impacts were likely to result from its construction (see p74-75 for a discussion of the planning phase). Objectors submissions to the public inquiries, and the Inspector's report reveal that the impacts most frequently anticipated were that the road would divide communities, would cause dangerous levels of pollution for children in local schools and would be visually intrusive. However data from press reports, interviews and the survey suggests that once the road was opened the only impact which was considered locally to be problematic was the noise generated by the road's surface.

Press Reports
In the months after the opening of the A27 in 1988 (August-December) the Observer carried a total of 37 items (articles, editorials, letters or photographs) about the A27. Fifty-one per cent of these were about noise. The bulk of remaining coverage in the first year was about issues around the opening of the new road and about the speed of traffic using it and accidents occurring. In 1989 there was less coverage of the A27 (32 items) but
almost all of this (81%) related to the problem of noise and local residents efforts to get the problem officially recognised. In 1990 coverage decreased to just 14 items, 64% of which were about the noise campaign. Coverage of the A27 remained fairly constant until July 1993; in 1991 19 items appeared, in 1992 17 and in 1993 (up to July) 13. The percentage of items about the noise campaign has also remained fairly steady; in 1991 it accounted for 79% of the total, 82% in 1992 and 61% in the first half of 1993. In summary in the period from the road’s opening in August 1988 until July 1993 the aspect of it which received most coverage in the Observer was the noise generated by its surface and local campaigns to achieve a solution to it.

Survey
The postal survey (see p83-84 for details of the survey methodology) asked respondents about the positive and negative effects that they thought the road had had. A total of 302 people provided information about negative impacts. The most commonly mentioned negative impact was noise, cited by 93% of respondents. The next most frequently recorded impacts were air pollution and various environmental impacts (this category includes a variety of claims that specific views or areas of land had been affected, or that plant or wildlife had suffered) which were mentioned by just 19% and 17% of respondents respectively. Respondents were also asked whether noise from the road had any effect on them personally and 90% replied that it did. Thus noise was by far the most frequently identified negative impact of the A27, and the majority of respondents felt that they were adversely affected by it.

Interviews
Of the 21 transcribed interviews, 16 were with people who lived in the locality or were representatives (local or district councillors) of people who did (see 82-83 for more details about the interviews). Of the remaining five interviews two were with representatives of the DoT, one was with the Inspector of the first Public Inquiry and the other two with people who had had their homes compulsorily purchased for the scheme. In the interviews respondents were asked what they considered to be the major social impacts, or effects on the local community, of the road. All of the respondents who lived in the area mentioned noise, whether or not they considered themselves to be personally affected by it. A number
of interviewees stated explicitly that noise was the only significant impact, for instance:

HBi  I think on the whole, generally speaking, there is no objection to the present road except for its surface and the noise generated there from.

HBii  Well, you see, right from day one this A27 'roar' is talked about, and that really is all there is to it.

HG  So there is an enormous benefit that Emsworth has received from this road, and if it wasn't for the noise everybody would be happy with it. But noise is the killer really.

All these sources of data therefore suggest that noise was considered to be the main impact of the A27.

**Considering the Impact of Noise as Socially Constructed**

Methodologies for SIA stress the importance of taking into account the perceptions and expectations of local people about likely impacts, both in order to ensure that assessments are correct and that they have local support (see p12-15 for a fuller discussion). However in this case even if an SIA had been conducted prior to the construction of the road it would have failed to anticipate the extent of the impact of noise correctly. The data collected show that prior to the road's construction local people anticipated a range of impacts (see p74-75) but that once it was built the only thing experienced as a significant impact was noise.

One explanation of why this is the case might point to the inherent uncertainty of predictions of impact, as Finsterbusch writes:

> Given the complex nature of social phenomena, a complete and accurate social impact assessment is nearly an impossible task except for highly standardized events (1994:1)

Even the best predictions can be upset by unexpected factors - in this case the choice of a concrete surface for the road. An alternative explanation might be that the anticipated impacts had not come about just because their possibility had been taken seriously, and measures had been taken to mitigate them during the planning process. However if a post-impact assessment were carried out it would almost certainly reveal that the design of the road had resulted in some social severance (some people's journeys were longer etc.), that
levels of pollution in the air were higher than before, and that the speed of cars using the new road posed a safety threat. Thus it is possible that these things could have become the subject of social impact claims making, so it is interesting that only noise was complained about.

Both of these explanations for the difference between the anticipated and experienced impacts adhere to a conception of social impacts as conditions, and consider complaints to be linked causally to the inception of conditions - people complained about noise because it was a problem, and not about other things because they did not turn out to be problematic. A social constructionist approach to problems starts from the premise that the relationship between conditions and claims is not so straightforward - that conditions may exist without being identified and treated as problems, and conversely that claims may be made about problems without this necessarily indicating anything about the existence or severity of a condition. The focus is on why claims emerge at a particular time, how they are organised and how they are maintained. This offers a promising approach for exploring sociologically the question of why protest emerged about noise generated by the surface of the A27.

As indicated in Chapter 2 the constructionist position adopted here is that outlined by Spector and Kitsuse which focuses on claims making activities and treats the existence or severity of conditions as irrelevant to the sociologist's analysis:

We are interested in constructing a theory of claims-making activities, not a theory of conditions. Thus the significance of objective conditions for us is the assertions made about them, not the validity of those assertions as judged from some independent standpoint, as for example, that of a scientist. To guard against the tendency to slip back into an analysis of the condition, we assert that even the existence of the condition itself is irrelevant to and outside of our analysis. (1987:76)

To follow this position is not to claim that the condition does not exist, nor even that there may not be a relationship between claims and conditions, rather it is methodological strategy which is useful in uncovering more about the situation. So the issue of whether the noise generated by the road was 'really' excessive or disruptive will be put aside in favour of a focus on the claims made about it. This is not to suggest that the condition did not exist or was not severe, but simply that these issues are not relevant to the analysis.
With this particular case study some challenges to the utility of the social constructionist approach immediately present themselves. Treating noise as a putative condition and maintaining a position of agnosticism about the existence of a 'real' problem may initially seem untenable for two reasons. First as outlined above one of the base assumptions of the constructionist approach is that protest does not inevitably attend conditions. However with the case of the A27, the accounts provided by interviewees link the identification of a problem explicitly to the inception of the condition. For instance:

HBii and it really was very, very interesting, we stood on that over-bridge there on the opening day, and watched the traffic come, and you could hear it approaching, and my wife turned to me and said 'that's the end of any peace we ever had'. And that was the reaction throughout the villages.

HP The day it opened I couldn't believe it. We actually went up and watched the old cars going along. The night it opened, at three o'clock in the morning I was out in the garden in tears. It was amazing, the noise was like being on the edge of Gatwick airport, it really was.

IIJ When the road opened and the first surge of traffic belted down, they had all been queuing to get onto the road, and as soon as the tapes were cut they just came in an absolute roar. I thought 'Good God, here we are, it's going to be like this 24 hours a day for ever'.

In this case the condition had a clear start date (when the road opened) and was apparently immediately identified as a problem. There are two points to be made about this. First, although clearly the noise from cars driving on the concrete surface could not exist before the road opened, identification of this noise as a problem was not inevitable. Other conditions such as severance and loss of land which had been anticipated during the planning stages commenced as soon as the construction of the road was under way, while others, notably emission of car fumes, began once it was operational. However none of these conditions were identified as problems or gave rise to organised protest and campaigning. Thus although the volume and nature of complaints are likely to be linked to the inception of a condition they are not simply an automatic response to it. The social constructionist approach explores why one condition rather than others is identified as a problem, drawing attention to the factors which facilitate its emergence and maintenance.

Secondly these claims themselves (that identification of a problem immediately attended the inception of the condition) are data to be analyzed, rather than 'facts' to be uncritically
accepted. The project of examining how claims are organised includes noting that participants account for the inception of claims making in this way and considering what role this plays in the social construction of the problem. The following chapter considers the rhetorical construction of the impact in some detail.

A further objection could be that unlike some of the social problems to which the approach has been applied (such as deviancy or child abuse) the incidence and dimensions of the problem of noise can apparently be easily and objectively measured. It would seem relatively straightforward to determine whether noise was really a problem by studying the results of noise level assessments. However the appropriate method for assessing noise levels was disputed and consequently official assessments were not always considered to depict adequately the 'reality' of the problem. There are two strands to this. First the DoT's noise assessment regulations consider only the level of noise and not its pitch. However protest about the noise was about the distinctive pitch caused by car tyres passing over the grooved concrete surface:

HJ I think it is because of the particular frequency band on which the sound is, that it is very penetrative.

HL noise measurements never seem to me to be - decibel levels seem to be an inadequate expression of the disruptive effect of noise.

HC You can reduce the decibels but it's the pitch of the noise which is important.

Thus the method of assessment did not take account of features of the condition which were causing concern and consequently the method was deemed inadequate by complainants.

Secondly, the assessment was based on calculation and did not involve actual noise measurements. The DoT justified this on the basis that measurements are subject to daily fluctuations caused by traffic flow and weather conditions. Local protestors claimed that such a 'desk top exercise' (Observer 2/2/89) failed to capture the characteristics of the noise and repeatedly called for ministers to come down and listen to it:

Observer 27/6/91
Furious residents are planning a new-style campaign to fight for a new surface on the notoriously noisy A27 from Havant to Chichester...Spokeswoman ( ) said...if they need any proof at all they have just got to come and listen to the road because it is getting worse.
Chairman of the district council quoted as saying:

it was a great pity that the job was not to be done properly. 'They should come down here and see it' she said.

Chairman of Residents Association quoted as saying:

The DoT is governed in what it can do by statistics, but we don't have statistics, we just hear the noise from that road.

A distinction was made between the knowledge of the noise held by local people and that held by the DoT. Local people portrayed their knowledge as being based on direct experience while the DOT's knowledge was depicted as abstract and distanced from the reality of the problem (see Chapter 6 for a detailed analysis of interviewees' accounts of their direct experience of the noise). The DoT defended their 'complex science' of noise assessment claiming that it 'has been the subject of considerable investigation' and that 'the public gets a better deal from the calculation method than by measurement' (Peter Bottomley - then Minister for Roads and Traffic - quoted in Chichester Observer, 30/3/89). However, their methods which control for variations in weather did not satisfy local people who claimed specifically that the noise was worse under certain conditions:

HBii The sound of the road...is very much windborne.

HG The normal wind blowing here is from the south west, so it is blowing towards the road from us here. But when the wind is in the north, you can hear the road here.

HH Certainly we find if the wind is from a certain direction particularly easterly, south-easterly, it really is very bad indeed. And people from the other side when the wind is south-westerly tend to get more noise from the road coming there.

HN If you have a certain humidity and a certain wind direction it affects such a wide area. I can hear it quite clearly in the morning four miles - maybe five miles away. Equally, on another occasion you won't hear a squeak.

HQ To a large extent...the prevailing weather conditions, the wind conditions and indeed the wet conditions...all affect the noise output.

What for the DoT was a bias to be removed from the equation was for local people an essential feature of the problem.
In summary, protest about noise was not an inevitable response to the commencement of the condition, and disagreement about appropriate noise assessment methodologies illustrate the difficulty of providing a definitive measure of the problem. Insights can be gained by considering noise as a putative condition and by considering the claims made about it without reference to 'actual' levels.

If it is assumed that protest was not an inevitable response to 'excessive' noise two interesting questions emerge. First, why did protest arise about any feature of the road? and secondly, why did protest focus on noise when it could conceivably have been about a range of other things?

**Explanations for the Emergence of Protest**

In this section three different explanations for the emergence of protest will be considered. The first draws attention to the social characteristics of those involved in the campaign, the second focuses on the relationship between local complaints about impacts and wider conceptions about what is problematic, and the third explores participants' own explanations of the background to the protest in terms of a feeling of having been let down by the DoT.

**Social Characteristics**

Considering the individual and social characteristics of those who become involved in protest about social problems forms a core part of traditional analyses of the emergence of protest. Research on local participation in planning decisions illustrates that middle and upper class adults are more likely to participate in local voluntary activities than those in lower classes, and that middle class retired people are those most likely to mount effective campaigns. Freudenberg and Olsen (1983), in a discussion of those members of the public most likely to participate in planning debates, cite a summary of available research which concludes that:

> Most studies of participation...demonstrate that it is those with higher income, higher education and higher status occupations who participate. (Verba and Nie 1972:12)

(see also Finsterbusch 1980, and Downs 1970). In this particular case the fact that residents had access to resources of time, money and expertise because many of them were retired professionals was likely to be an important factor in the emergence and maintenance of
Spector and Kitsuse acknowledge that examining the social characteristics of those involved in campaigns seems sensible but argue that it is not central to an examination of claims making activities. They consider that concentrating on why people participate in claims making activities deflects attention from the organization of claims making activities themselves:

Since we consider the activities themselves to be the subject matter of social problems, we direct our inquiry to the forms of those activities. We would ask how those activities become organised as they are, rather than why participants become involved in them. We do not mean to say that the latter question is not related to the former, but it is not central to that question. (1987:82)

However it is not clear that these central questions of 'why social problems activities are organised the way they are (and) how variations in organisation be accounted for' (ibid:83) can be sufficiently answered without a consideration of social characteristics. It is inevitable that the social background and circumstances of participants will equip them with varying skills for organising an effective protest, useful contacts and financial resources, and will influence the strategies they use to make their claims and the way in which they construct the problem.

Although Spector and Kitsuse argue that analysis should move away from looking at the characteristics of those involved in protests several of the questions they recommend sociologists should address in exploring claims making activity seem to direct attention back towards the characteristics of claims makers. For instance they note that a claim is a demand that one party makes upon another and suggest attention should be paid to 'How do these two parties get together so that one is the claimant and the other the recipient of the claim' (ibid:83). In this case study the claims were made by local people to the DoT. A variety of strategies were used, but the main ones were attempting to get local MPs interested in the problem and hoping that they would be able to effect some change through political channels, and arranging meetings with DoT representatives and the Minister for Transport to discuss the issue. The background and experience of participants is key in understanding and explaining why these particular strategies were selected. As retired professionals they had experience which was useful in communicating and establishing
relations with officials. They also had a range of expertise which they could marshall in mounting an effective campaign. Members of the action groups had the confidence and expertise necessary to read and assess technical information about road surfaces and even to conduct small scale research of their own. The leader of one action group described the research the group had done:

HJ We’ve got a lot of well qualified scientific minds around here...and they all went to it with a will...and we managed to get hold of all sorts of technical manuals, and one of the first things we did...we measured the depth of the grooves.

While the leader of a resident’s group talked of his own research:

HQ I personally went to some trouble to secure all the documents related to road noise generation from the Department of Road Research at Crowthorne, and I read these documents - I am an engineer basically...

With reference to the recipients of claims Spector and Kitsuse note that:

Agencies have their own idea of the work they are authorized to do and the clientele who can legitimately demand their services. They may agree or refuse to recognise, accept, or register the proffered claim. Any of a variety of factors may influence them to weigh their authority and discretion, interpret their mandate, and finally, to include or exclude a claim from their jurisdiction. (op cit:83)

Although the campaign to get the road resurfaced was based on the belief that the DoT had made a wrong and unfair decision in selecting a cheap concrete surface, in general the campaign was not overtly hostile towards the DoT. Those involved sought to establish good relations with the DoT and to be taken seriously by them. Interviewees involved in the campaign often stressed that they understood how the DoT worked and respected their position although they disagreed with it:

HBii Now, ok, one accepts the financial imperatives that there are on these things, and being entirely realistic about it I quite understand the attitude that the Department might take which is 'we have a road, it’s not falling apart, it’s carrying traffic, people have been awarded compensation for loss of value of their properties. Why should we do anything about it now?'...So I can perfectly well understand that.

HJ We’ve all dealt with them in various ways, telephoned them or met them, and they have all been extremely co-operative in every way...You see, I mean the Department of Transport are you know, like everybody else. They have a book of rules and they have a road manual which tells them what their parameters are, and they have to do what they are told.
Although the DoT disagreed with local people's assessments of the problem of noise they did engage with their complaints to the extent that their representatives agreed to meet protesters, corresponded with them, and visited the site. The fact that those protesting were middle class and carried out their protest in a form which the DoT considered reasonable and respectable may well have been an important factor influencing them in their engagement with claimants and their claims.

None of this is to suggest that the protest only took off because the action groups were largely made up of middle class and retired people. Although research suggest that these people are those most likely to participate in voluntary organisations recent direct action against roads has mobilised people from all sectors of society. However the social characteristics of participants are not inconsequential and are likely to affect the shape of the protest. Social constructionism is an action perspective - it focuses on the activities of those involved in social problems work rather then trying to identify external structural factors which influence or determine the emergence and maintenance of claims. Clearly an explanation for the emergence of protest in this case study which simply drew attention to the social characteristics of residents would be inadequate and could not be described as a constructionist analysis. However to the extent that the social position and background of participants informed the ways in which they made their claims and the way in which these were responded to, it seems that these are relevant factor in building a social constructionist explanation of the campaign.

The Relationship between Local and National Problems

Conditions which come to constitute local social problems are linked to wider national and international conceptions of what is problematic. There is a range of literature on public opinions and attitudes on environmental issues and on media coverage of environmental issues. This literature suggests that public awareness and concern and media coverage developed during the 1960s, peaked around 1970, receded, and then began to increase again in the mid-1980s (see Young 1990 for a discussion of public opinions and attitudes, and Hansen 1991 for references on media coverage).

The connection between international, national and local conceptions of problems is a
complex one. Although problems which attract national or international attention are often conceptualised as more important than those which are just the focus of local claims the levels cannot be easily separated in this way. Consideration of environmental problems particularly illustrates the degree to which the international, national and local are interconnected rather than being arranged in a hierarchy. First, even those problems which seem to be uncontroversially 'global' have effects which are experienced in specific localities. For instance the depletion of the ozone layer is likely to have health effects first of all for those living close to the poles. Of course this issue is global in that the causes, effects, and concern about them are not confined to these localities, but they are experienced first and most dramatically there. In addition attention is often drawn to the need to 'think globally and act locally' in order to address environmental problems. For all of the problems that are considered to be most serious, action is advocated at a local level, whether that is conserving energy, reusing and recycling materials or reducing emissions. It is not only that local action is advocated as part of the response to global problems but also that what happens at a local level is considered to contribute to problems which have much wider impacts. For instance emissions from individual power stations in Britain lead to problems of acid rain in Scandinavia, individual car use contributes to wider problems of pollution and so on. The point is that global and local environmental problems are inextricable, the local cannot be considered in isolation.

This interconnection between global and local problems is usually discussed as above in terms of the causes, effects and solutions for problems. However it applies equally to concern and claims making about problems. Claims making at a local level is inevitably informed by claims that are being made and being taken seriously in wider fora, and in turn each incident of local claims making contributes to the construction of a national or even wider ‘problem’. In the dispute about the A27’s surface the impact was sometimes framed explicitly as an environmental problem, for instance:

HBii As a resident here and as somebody who is actually concerned about the environment and all forms of pollution there are, I think something should be done about this road.

HN It has made an environmental pollution in terms of noise.

HL The quality of the environment you are in is obviously less…and no matter how
much money the Department of Transport costs as compensation I don’t think it counts for the loss of that environmental quality.

IIIG What has been traffic wise an enormous success, has turned out environmentally to be a disaster.

The construction of the noise as an environmental problem was not used extensively in the campaign, however it seems likely that the pervasiveness and acceptability of environmental concern played a part in facilitating protest. Recognition that the development of road schemes may have detrimental environmental and social consequences fits into a context of increased concern about the protection of the environment. There now exists a climate in which complaints about the effects of specific road schemes resonate with wider environmental concerns; claims about local impacts are thus more likely to be considered legitimate and participants recognise that they have a chance of having their complaints taken seriously. The extent to which framing a concern as environmental legitimises complaint will be considered in more detail in Chapter 8.

The Relationship between Claimants and the Agencies to whom Claims are Directed

A third strand in an explanation of the emergence of claims might focus on the relationship between those protesting and the object of their protests - the DoT. As mentioned above Spector and Kitsuse define a claim as 'a demand that one party makes upon another' (1987:83) and suggest that an exploration of the relationship between these parties is a crucial part of the explication of claims making activities.

In exploring the relationship between the parties as a possible explanation for the emergence of protest, it is important to avoid the analysis turning into a search for the real motives which lie behind participants' explanations of their conduct. For instance it might be suggested that local people were actually motivated to complain because they had previously been let down by the DoT, and consequently did not trust them and felt hostile towards them. Although his sort of explanation is appealing it is ultimately a speculation which goes beyond the available data. As such it could be characterised as what C. Wright Mills (1940) calls 'motive mongering' - an attempt to distinguish individuals' 'real' motives from the reasons they themselves give for their conduct (for a fuller discussion of Mills' argument see p163-165).
Mills argues that motives are the answers people give to the question 'why did you do that?', and that sociological analysis should concentrate on the vocabularies utilised to justify a course of action. So a social constructionist analysis of the relationship between the parties should concentrate on how participants themselves describe the relationship and how they use this as a justification or explanation for their conduct, and not assume that this relationship can be assessed independently of such accounts.

In their accounts of the campaign about noise a number of interview and survey respondents described themselves as feeling that they had been misled and generally treated badly by the DoT. Interviewees talked about a 'climate of distrust', of people feeling 'unhappy and embittered', and 'betrayed'. There were two main strands to this, the first being that the Minister had overruled the finding of the inspector at the first inquiry that a northern route would be preferable to the DoT’s recommended route. Local people complained that the public inquiry was a 'farce', with individual people having the odds stacked against them from the start. Interviewees who had been objectors at the first inquiry claimed that when they heard that the Inspector’s recommendation had been overruled:

HH ...this really took the wind out of all our sails actually, and it certainly opened our eyes to the farce really of public inquiries.

HM It just made one rather cynical about the whole public inquiry process

HK I think in a sense people were more aggrieved by the fact that in a sense they had won the argument but lost the battle sort of thing, won the battle lost the war

The second area in which respondents reported that they had been let down by the DoT was over the surface for the road. At the second inquiry the inspector had recommended that the DoT should ensure that the surface of the road be as quiet as possible. However this recommendation was ignored and the cheapest option of a concrete surface chosen.

HH And the other point of course, the surface of the road, and again the Inspector at the second inquiry actually ...recommended that the surface of the road should be such as to produce the minimum amount of noise..and in the reply the Secretary of State at the time or the Department of Transport did say yes, they would take that into account..and again we have been very badly let down on that.

HL I think the bitterness behind all of this of course stems from the reassurances we were given, that the road would have a surface on it which would be a quiet road surface, which obviously was totally overturned.
Thus respondents constructed a picture of a climate of anger and frustration with the DoT that existed before the road was opened.

The extent to which opposition is motivated by lack of trust and bad relationships between local people and authorities has been stressed in much work on risk perception. A number of writers conclude that public anxiety and protest about environmental risks is motivated primarily by a lack of trust in the authorities responsible for implementing or regulating technology. For instance Slovic et al writing about public perceptions of risk from nuclear waste state that:

> public fears of and opposition to nuclear waste disposal plans can be seen as a 'crisis in confidence', a profound breakdown of public trust in the scientific governmental and industrial managers of nuclear technologies. (1991:29).

They conclude that once public trust is destroyed it cannot easily be restored.

However for the social constructionist analysis pursued here rather than taking anger at and lack of trust in the DoT as an adequate explanation of protest, attention is drawn to the way in which participants themselves invoked these emotions as part of the background to the campaign about noise. By describing their feelings in this way participants might be seen as implicitly justifying or explaining their participation in the campaign. The theme of feeling let down by the DoT was not restricted to participants' descriptions of the time preceding the opening of the road, but persisted throughout accounts of the campaign. For instance the story presented in the local press is one of a campaign with a history of peaks and troughs; of a recurrent cycle of hopes being raised, only for them to be dashed again. Being 'let down' is not only used as an implicit justification for the emergence of protest it is also used to encourage and justify continued campaigning. The campaign is framed as a simple struggle for fairness and justice, with the DoT being constructed as unreliable and untrustworthy.

Thus if a reason for the emergence of protest is sought which puts aside the idea that protest is an inevitable response to excessive noise, three partial answers can be suggested. First the fact that the area had a large retired professional population both facilitated the emergence and maintenance of protest and informed the claims making strategies used.
Secondly the wider context in which increasing attention is paid to the environmental impacts of developments means that at a local level claims about impacts are likely to be considered legitimate and participants recognise that they have a chance of having their claims taken seriously by officialdom. Finally I have drawn attention to the way in those involved in protesting about the noise drew on aspects of the planning of the road scheme to build a picture of themselves as having been continually let down. These accounts might be seen as an implicit way of explaining the emergence and maintenance of their campaign.

**Explanations for the Identification and Maintenance of Noise as an Impact**

Explaining why any protest emerged does not explain why protest focused on noise to the exclusion of other impacts. In this section the question of why it was noise that became identified as an impact rather than anything else is addressed. First it is suggested that local complaints about noise should be seen within the context of the emergence of noise as a national problem. The relationship of problems and solutions is then discussed and the suggestion made that noise became an impact because there were clearly defined solutions available. In explaining the maintenance of protest the way in which the impact of noise was 'packaged' is an important factor. Attention is drawn here to the adoption of a particular phrase to describe the impact and to the visual images which accompanied press reports about it. Finally, and most substantially, competing definitions of the impact between local people and the DoT are identified, and this disjunction suggested as a particular explanation for ongoing dispute.

**Noise as a New Social Problem**

Noise is increasing coming to be seen as a serious environmental problem within the UK. For instance Vidal (1993) claims:

> Britain, already one of the noisiest countries in the world, is getting worse as environmental background noise - from traffic to car alarms and lawnmowers to music played in shops - increases annually. (1993:1)

He reports that the UK government now recognises noise as a pollutant and catalogues research findings which indicate the negative effects - from stress to deafness - which noise has on individuals. Griffiths (1996) agrees that 'noise levels are rising’ and draws attention
to a 'growing silence protection industry':

you can get cassettes of silence. Ear plugs sell well. 'Smart' buildings manufacture optimum sound levels (1996:2)

_Social Trends_ has a section on environmental concern which in 1996 included for the first time a consideration of concern about noise. The report notes that 'noise has become a major concern in recent years' (1996:191) and uses the example of complaints about noise from domestic premises to illustrate this. Figures are provided which show that around 3,000 complaints per million population were received from environmental health officers in England and Wales in 1992-1993. The rate of complaints has risen steadily since 1981, with the level for 1992-1993 being over four times the rate for 1981.

Increasing concern and complaints about noise from a variety of sources are usually explained by the suggestion that the world has actually become noisier. This is an insufficient account as one of the main insight of social constructionism is that complaints are not necessarily linked in such a straightforward way to conditions. Thus the whole question of why noise from many different sources has become the focus for concern is a research question which would merit investigation. That is beyond the scope of this thesis, but what is relevant here is the observation that concern about noise is a widespread phenomenon. It is within this context that complaints about the very specific noise generated by car tyres on the A27's surface should be understood. As outlined in the preceding section local identification and concern about impacts will be informed by wider conceptions of what is problematic.

_Problems and Solutions_

Spector and Kitsuse (1987) argue that contrary to the commonsense notion that solutions are developed once problems are apparent, the reverse is true: solutions produce problems by providing the framework within which those problems can be stated. They argue that the belief that something could be done about a condition is a prerequisite to it becoming a social problem. This provides some explanation of why protest arose about noise rather than about anything else. Once the road was built many of the problems aired at the public inquiry were beyond solution; debate had centred on where the road should be sited and
once that was decided and implemented there could be little possible gain from continuing to claim that it should have been built elsewhere.

In addition some of the other impacts of road schemes such as social severance and emotional reactions to changes in the locality are somewhat intangible and do not suggest any obvious solutions. In contrast, noise is a tangible and concrete impact to which a range of solutions are available. It may be that the more nebulous social concerns and fear are reformulated into concern about a technical problem which is identifiable, nameable and recognised by 'experts'.

**Packaging the Impact**

The noise was referred to locally as 'the A27 roar'. Schoenfeld et al note that in the early stages of making claims about a putative social problem claims makers are:

> aided significantly if they can find a distinctive term for their overall concern, if only for the convenience of headline writers. (1979:39-40)

The first mention of the 'A27 roar' in the local press was on 1st September 1988 right at the start of the campaign. The *Chichester Observer* headlined their front page report 'Residents' fury over 'A27 roar'’ and went on to say:

> sound barriers and resurfacing work are being demanded for the new Chichester-Havant A27 by hundreds of angry people living near the road - in a storm of protest over noise dubbed the 'A27 roar' (1/9/88)

The report does not say who has 'dubbed' the noise the 'A27 roar', but it went on to acquire common usage both in the press and by residents. A quarter of the articles in the press reporting aspects of the campaign about noise used the term in their headline, for instance:

> 'Opinions sought on A27 roar' (6/10/88)
> 'Profiting by the road roar’ (25/5/89)
> 'Roads minister invited to hear A27 roar' (31/8/89)
> 'Residents suffer two years of A27 roar' (30/8/90)

References to the roar also recurred in interviews:

**HJ**

> When the road opened and the first surge of traffic belted down...they just came in an absolute roar
In the kitchen there is a big swing window, you open that, as you do immediately you get a tremendous roar.

Right from day one this A27 roar is talked about.

You get a dull background roar almost all the time.

As Burgess and Harrison (1993) illustrate, claims about environmental change 'circulate', with press accounts influencing public interpretations, but equally public and expert discourses may be taken up by the media. Media references to the 'roar' both reflected and sustained local usage of the term. Clearly the 'A27 roar' provided a more succinct and manageable term for the impact than for instance 'the noise generated by the ribbed concrete surface'. In addition the word 'roar' also provides some description of the type and extent of noise that was being generated. While a noise may be quiet or pleasant, a roar indicates a particularly loud and compelling sound.

The visual images which accompany stories in the press can also play an important role in conveying a memorable idea of the impact. Corner and Richardson (1993) in their research on tv portrayals and audience understandings of nuclear power note that the visual image is as important as the spoken in conveying a particular view of the issue, and with reference to newspaper reports Mazur and Lee write:

Impressions of a news report may be formed from scanning its headline, an accompanying picture and its caption or perhaps the first paragraph or two of text. (1993:683)

Mazur and Lee also make the observation that all the global environmental issues which have become the focus for mass concern have:

become associated with powerful visuals that eventually come to symbolise these problems. (ibid:711)

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1 The Oxford English Dictionary defines roar thus:
'of persons: to utter a very loud and deep or hoarse cry...'
'of animals: to utter a loud deep cry..'
'of cannon, thunder, wind, the sea or other inanimate agents: to make a loud noise or din...'

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These range from NASA's computer pictures of the ozone hole to photographs of charismatic animals to symbolise species loss.

these simple if slightly misleading images encapsulate these complex problems in the mind of the media audience (ibid:711).

The problem of noise is a difficult one to convey visually, and this is reflected in the low number of photographs which appeared in the press alongside reports of the 'A27 Roar'. Of the 91 articles which were published in the Chichester Observer about noise only six were illustrated with photographs (three of these used two photographs). The images used were:

- 24/8/89 two photographs of protestors on a demonstration to mark a year of the problem;
- 8/2/90 photograph of the Minister for Roads visiting the area and 'listening' to the road;
- 30/8/90 two photographs of residents who had 'suffer(ed) two years of 'A27 roar’';
- 25/6/92 photographs of both local MPs who had agreed to work together to secure a meeting between the Minister for Roads and local people;
- 8/7/92 photograph of Minister for Roads visiting the area and 'listening' to the road.
- 1/10/92 photograph of local resident outside his home which is described as 'battered by noise'.

As so few photographs were used no attempt will be made to analyze them; it appears that visual imagery did not play a large part in the construction of the impact. However it is perhaps worth noting that two pictures were used of different ministers for roads 'listening' to the road. As outlined earlier (p91) a key feature of the local campaign was the attempt to get representatives of the DoT to listen to the noise, on the basis that direct experience was necessary in order to appreciate the problem.

**Competing Definitions of the Problem**

The A27 roar was considered locally to be the result of a mistake by the DoT and a result of their (misguided) concern to save money. The account usually provided was that the Department selected a concrete surface for the road as this was a cheaper option than tarmac ('black top'). The surface had grooves brushed into it by the contractors to prevent
skidding. However at the time of construction the DoT supplied no specification about the maximum depth of the grooves, only about the minimum. Consequently the grooves were cut deep to increase resistance and as car tyres pass over these grooves the characteristic 'roar' results. The roar was conceived of as a problem which could have been avoided, or a mistake, which had caused unnecessary suffering for local people. For instance interviewees said:

HP   We all feel that it wasn’t necessary to affect us this way.

HH   Clearly they’ve made a mistake on this one, they won’t admit it, they’ve made a mistake, a very bad mistake in putting that surface down.

HG   It was said to be an experimental surface and if it’s an experimental surface they ought to be prepared if it wasn’t a success to come back and do something else, but they didn’t and they weren’t..they won’t come back and correct the mistake, that’s the problem.

In this account the DoT are considered to be the perpetrators of the problem and the only party that can provide redress.

This formulation of the problem contrasts with the DoT’s assessment of the situation. In an information sheet they produced about the road they claim that:

Problems have arisen here primarily not as a consequence of the type of surface used...but rather of people in proximity to a new and busy road where previously there was none. (DoT 1989)

In this version the problem is that local people are unused to busy roads and thus no action is necessary because as time passes they will get used to the road. The DoT’s noise assessments calculated that the road generated enough noise to justify the provision of household insulation and the erection of noise barriers. However they attributed this level of noise to higher than anticipated traffic levels rather than to the grooved concrete surface.

These contrasting constructions of the nature of the problem led to contrasting solutions being considered acceptable. For local objectors the only acceptable solution was for the road to be resurfaced; this would constitute a tacit admission by the DoT that they had made a mistake in laying the original surface. However, from the DoT’s position other
more limited responses were appropriate. Once they had conceded that the road was indeed too noisy they responded by providing measures to insulate people from the noise by means of secondary glazing inside homes and noise barriers alongside the road. Nevertheless, despite the use of the best available technology their attempts were met with local contempt and dismissed as 'inadequate', 'useless' and 'interim measures'. It is worth considering responses to each 'solution' in turn.

**Secondary Glazing**

The DoT have regulations whereby householders living within 300m from a new road and experiencing a certain level of noise are eligible for a grant to enable rooms to be soundproofed by double glazing. Both survey respondents and interviewees were asked whether they had had the glazing installed and for their opinions of it. Thirty per cent of survey respondents had had the glazing installed, and of these ninety per cent agreed that it was successful in reducing noise levels in the home. However this does not imply that they were happy with the glazing or that they considered it to be an effective solution to the impact of the A27 roar. When asked if they had any comments about the glazing common complaints were that the regulations were not suitable for many houses, did not allow for enough windows to be glazed and that the glazing was only effective so long as all windows were kept closed.

The interview respondents provided more detailed information about these shortcomings. The regulations specify that a gap must be left between window and glazing, vents must be installed on the outside of the building and venetian blinds placed between the existing window and the new glazing. Interviewees complained that these specifications were unsuitable for older houses and particularly for listed buildings, which some of their homes were:

HL  They offered us double glazing but how can you double glaze a house like this? You can’t...double glazing would have wrecked the place, absolutely wrecked it.

HBii  if you have this secondary glazing installed you have to have a ventilation fan installed which is something about two foot by one foot thick by six inches deep. Now that requires sort of air bricks and so on on the outside which is not always easy to get listed building permission for...and secondly there really isn’t the wall space in my cottage, which has got small rooms, to put the thing. So if I accept that secondary glazing in the form of formal specifications I’ve got to have this dirty
great box, using electricity which I have to pay for, to ventilate the room in a way that actually I think is unnecessary because we have a live fire in there and you get a dirty great draft.

The second failing of the insulation specifications mentioned is that they only cover the glazing of certain rooms:

HBii I mean the current rules for secondary glazing will not pay it, only pay it for living rooms. That does not include a kitchen. Now you tell a housewife that a kitchen is not a living room. That’s one stupidity as it were.

HD It’s ridiculous really because wherever you are you can hear it. Because you happen to have two rooms nearest to it they’re the rooms they offer to have done. But the remainder of the home is not done. But if you open the door of the ground floor you can hear it, it’s ludicrous...it’s all silly thinking to me.

The final complaint is not related to the specifications, but is that glazing fails to address the problem. That is, it cannot reduce the noise experienced in the garden, as one interviewee succinctly put it:

HBi You can double glaze a house but you can’t double glaze a garden

and it prevents residents from opening their windows:

HQ double glazing isn’t the answer to the consistent noise day and night, because you have to open windows and people like to get out.

Chapter 6 provides more detail of respondents’ accounts of how noise affects them and reveals that the features which they consistently report are that their enjoyment of their gardens is spoilt, and that they can no longer open their windows in the summer. Thus they argued that the secondary glazing failed to address the problem as people could not be insulated from the noise at all times, they were still subject to it if they wanted to use their gardens or open their windows.

Noise Barriers

When the campaign about the A27 roar began there was some division between the groups involved about whether noise barriers offered a potential solution to the problem. Some noise barriers had been provided when the road was opened, and some people argued that the problem of the roar would be solved if the DoT provided more and better barriers. One of the large residents’ associations began by pushing hard for the installation of barriers.
One of their representatives was interviewed, and he described how the group had originally felt that:

HQ we'd be better served by addressing the question of containment, i.e. barriers, cuttings, embankments, than we would in pursuing road surface change, which many of the other protest groups in the area along the road were shooting for, they all wanted the road resurfaced in tarmac.

He described how the group had had some success in 'terms of having additional barriers built' but then went on to say:

HQ sadly they proved virtually ineffective...And so as of about two years ago, we... changed our tack and joined if you will the resurfacing lobby, that is linked up with other groups along the A27 that were shouting for resurfacing and nothing less.

His assessment that the barriers were 'virtually ineffective' was widely shared. In the survey respondents were asked whether they had any comments to make about the barriers and sixty-seven percent responded that they were ineffective or useless. Interviewees agreed:

HJ They (sound barriers) are of a German design, supplied by a German firm. Completely unique in this country, and I have to say very useless.

HH But I'm afraid these ugly barriers they are putting up, which are a sort of a fob, they say 'oh well we are doing our best' this sort of thing 'actually trying what we can to reduce the impact of noise' but making things a lot worse. They are not reducing the noise, not significantly anyway, and actually making bad visual impact on the environment.

HN Now then, we come to the other feature, which is in terms of road building, do noise screens and noise bunds apart from the psychological impact they have in that they are doing something about it, do they really work? And the answer to that is no.

Some respondents were cynical about the DoT's motives in erecting the barriers. One who was a central figure in the campaign about the roar joked that he thought that the DoT had placed a barrier close to his house as an attempt to placate him as he was making such a fuss about the noise:

HJ I think they ought to have put them further on in Emsworth where there are a lot of people living and the road is on an embankment anyway, and they suffer terribly. They didn’t do that and they have got them here, mainly because I live here, shouldn’t say this but it’s a joke really.

The idea that the barriers were intended to quell protest about the noise was also raised by
other interviewees. For instance HH in the extract above suggests that the main rationale for siting barriers was that it would make people think that the DoT were 'doing their best...actually trying to reduce the impact of noise', he calls them 'a fob', suggesting they are intended to work as some sort of placebo making people feel better without actually changing the situation. HN also picks up this idea referring to the 'psychological' effect of the barriers, they placate people by making them feel that at least the DoT are 'doing something about it'.

For the DoT the problem of the road was not so much the noise generated by the surface but the noise made about the noise by local residents. If the road was measurably noisy but no-one complained presumably there would be no reason for the DoT to attempt to ameliorate the noise. Residents suggested that the barriers were intended to reduce this noise about noise, at least as much as they were intended to reduce actual noise. This idea was also reflected in the local press' reporting of reactions to the barriers. A headline in October 1991 read 'A27 noise barriers fail to silence residents' (10/1/91).

The idea that the DoT were more concerned to reduce complaints than to reduce noise levels fits with the conception of social problems as claims making activities. For the DoT it is the local claims and complaints about noise which constitute the problem to be addressed. Shielding residents from noise by installing glazing and erecting noise barriers may have been expected to lessen complaints either because the efforts would actually reduce the noise experienced, or because they would create the impression that the DoT were concerned to improve conditions. However from the residents' viewpoint these measures were ineffective as they failed to do anything about the problematic road surface. From the DoT's point of view they must also be deemed largely ineffective as they failed to reduce the volume of complaints, and indeed provided scope for further complaints.

**Compensation**

Under Part 1 of the Land Compensation Act 1973 home owners are entitled to claim compensation for the deprecation of the value of their property due to noise or other effects arising from the use of new or improved roads. Clearly compensation cannot solve the problem of noise. However if as outlined above the 'real problem' for the DoT is the level
of local protest about the noise, then providing compensation may be expected to placate residents. Thus for the DoT it might be considered a possible solution to the problem. However from the response of survey respondents and from interviewees’ comments it seems that compensation has suffered the same fate as insulation and barriers. It is not considered to provide any sort of solution to the noise generated by the road surface, and has provided a focus for new complaints.

The issue of compensation was raised by many interviewees as the money was being paid out at about the time that interviewing took place. Local newspapers were carrying reports and letters about the amounts received. Interviewees displayed their awareness that compensation might be regarded as a possible solution to the noise but stressed that it could do nothing to ameliorate the impact.

All the interviewees who discussed compensation agreed that regardless of the amount received, money could not compensate for the effects of noise:

HL  I mean, to put it into figures ours was £3,750 sort of stuff, which - you take it, buy the odd holiday, buy the odd new car, but its not really compensation for a long term loss of environmental quality. So I don't think we feel compensated. But I don't think it would be possible to come up with a sum of money which is a compensation.

HQ  The fact is that even recipients of the fairly handsome compensation can still not sit in their gardens during the summer months, those that live close to the road. And this is a total change in their life style. They argued 'why should we have to put up with this nonsense of not being able to use our homes?' The compensation is only an award if you like against the reduced value of the home, which would only come into force if ever they sold and moved on, but in the meantime they have to put up with the misery of the road noise which is very serious.

HBl You can compensate a person for the actual physical, I say physical, I mean bank-balance loss of value of his property, but doesn't it come to the fact that he's living in discomfort, if he stays in that house, for the rest of his life.

This sort of argument was also made repeatedly by survey respondents. Seventy-one per cent of households represented in the survey had received compensation, but few regarded the amount they had received as generous (5%), with most assessing it as about right (40%) or not enough (55%). The vast majority (82%) of these people answered that they did not consider that the money compensated for the effect of the road. Unfortunately there was
some confusion attached to this question. The question was intended to uncover whether people felt that compensation was a solution to the road's impacts. However as a few respondents commented, compensation is awarded for loss of property value, not directly against the impacts of the road. They clearly felt that the question was irrelevant or badly worded because the money was not intended to compensate for impacts.

The amount of money paid out in compensation was criticised by a number of interviewees. They argued that compensation does not address the noise generated by the road surface, and is thus a waste of money. The amount paid out was characterised as excessive, although estimates of this amount varied greatly between accounts. One way in which respondents illustrated that the level of expenditure has been excessive was by comparing it to the original amount spent on constructing the road:

HJ they have, this was up till July, spent 12 million on compensating people, and that was at a point where they had only processed half the applications. Now if the other half, and this is conjectural, but if the other half amounted to another 12 million, that means that the compensation paid will have exceeded the contract, tender price of the road, which is 19 million. If it goes up to say 20 million it will exceed it anyway. Well that is horrifying isn’t it?

HIG And they have spent millions of pounds now on trying to compensate the people for the trouble. In fact I’m told that they have now spent more in compensation than it cost to build the road. It’s unbelievable.

HM I think originally when the scheme was mooted back in the 1970’s the amount of compensation which they thought they would have to pay out was well under a million pounds. It’s now approaching twenty which is very nearly the cost of the road construction.

Thus although residents’ groups had pressed for adequate compensation since construction of the road began, and some individuals conceded that the amounts received were fair, providing generous compensation did not lessen disquiet about the noise generated by the road surface. Indeed it provided another topic for complaint. As the problem was identified as lying in the road surface itself, any attempts to mitigate the impact of noise which did not change the surface were deemed a waste of time and money. A number of respondents estimated the amount of money which had been spent to date on these various ‘solutions’, and argued that the money would have been better spent in providing a new road surface:
It is certainly true that they have spent a lot of money in sound-proofing, they have spent a lot of money in compensation, and some of that I think probably could have been better applied to quietening the road as far as possible.

I mean you see what really annoys me is that all this compensation's being paid out, it doesn't alter anything. They're just paying compensation out, and people are receiving it. And they're probably very pleased to receive it, because that is their right and due. But I mean at the end of the day, I mean personally I'd much rather have a proper surface which doesn't make the noise than the money.

they have probably spent more money in compensation and in sound barriers, noise barriers, than they would have if they resurfaced the road in area which would be beneficial to the heavily populated areas.

Thus overall the Dot's measures were singularly unsuccessful at achieving an end to the protest as they failed to appreciate what that protest was about. Their solutions attempted to insulate 'sensitive' residents from the noise, or compensate them for the experience. These solutions failed to recognise the underlying moral character of residents complaints that a concrete surface should not have been laid, that it was unfair that they should be subject to noise and that the DoT should admit that they had made a mistake and address it at source. Rather than reducing complaints the DoT's solutions provided scope for further complaints - about the design and provision of secondary glazing, about the effectiveness and appearance of noise barriers, and about the amount of money spent on compensation.

Conclusions
This chapter has used a social constructionist approach to account for the emergence and maintenance of protest about the impact of noise from the A27 Havant/Chichester. In explaining why any protest emerged the influence of the social characteristics of participants was discussed and the relationship between local concern about impact and wider conceptions of what is problematic was noted. Spector and Kitsuse suggest that another important source of explanation lies in the relationship between participants and the party to whom their claims are addressed. A case is made for concentrating on participants' constructions of this relationship, and attention is drawn to the way in which participants in the dispute used the feeling of being 'let down' by the DoT as a justification for both the emergence and maintenance of protest.
The chapter then moved on to consider why noise was singled out as a significant impact, and to begin to explore how the impact of noise was constructed. Again attention was drawn to the relationship between local and national conceptions of what is problematic, and the suggestion made that noise is an emergent national social problem. In addition to fitting in with wider concerns noise was also an impact to which clear solutions were available, and thus was more likely to be identified as an impact than something which could not so easily be resolved. The impact came to be known locally as the 'A27 roar' and it is suggested that this played an important role by providing a clear and succinct term and an identifiable image for the impact. The most substantial section of the chapter outlined the competing definitions of the impact formed by local people and by the DoT. It is suggested that this disjunction served to exacerbate protest as the parties were talking past each other - the impact being addressed was different for each party. As a consequence local people rejected the solutions offered by the DoT as they were not solutions to the impact as they constructed it.

The application of the approach has implications for the practice of assessing the social and environmental impacts of new developments. Text books recommend that social impact assessments should consider both 'objective' and 'subjective' levels of impact; assessments should not only consider whether there is 'actually' a problem, but also pay attention to local perceptions of what is problematic. However in practice they rarely probe into how the problem is framed and conceptualised, or consider any mismatch between official and local constructions of the problem. The social constructionist approach provides a way of making explicit these dimensions. Unless this is done there is the possibility that recommended solutions will address the manifest features of a problem (e.g. noise) but in failing to consider and address local construction of the problem will actually make protest worse.
Chapter 6

The Rhetorical Construction of the Impact of Noise.

In Chapter 5 a social constructionist approach was applied to the case study of the A27 Havant/Chichester to suggest answers to the questions of why any protest emerged after the road was built, and why noise specifically came to be considered problematic while other issues were ignored. In this chapter I will explore the issue of the social construction of this social impact at a more detailed level and consider how participants’ accounts (or claims making activities) were constructed in order to achieve the sense that noise was a serious and significant social impact.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is a term which is used to refer to a variety of different ways of working in socio-linguistics, social psychology and social theory. Here I am referring only to the approach exemplified by the work of Gilbert and Mulkay (1984), Potter and Wetherell (1988) and Edwards and Potter (1992). This approach has its origins in the philosophical work of Wittgenstein and Austin, and is influenced by the sociological recommendations of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis. In contrast to traditional approaches within sociology, discourse analysis does not assume that language somehow corresponds to, or can be taken as 'standing for' states of affairs as they 'really are'. Instead of regarding language as a detached commentary on reality it is viewed as a dynamic medium through which this reality is actually constituted.

Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) developed discourse analysis as a response to the methodological difficulties encountered by sociologists studying scientists’ actions and beliefs. Previous research in this field had tended to use scientists’ accounts unreflectively, that is, as providing an unproblematic access to the events the scientists were describing. However Gilbert and Mulkay noted that within the accounts they gathered from scientists there was a huge amount of variability in the way that the same events were described. This was apparent not only in accounts from different scientists, or from the same scientist in different contexts (e.g. in journal papers, interviews and informal conversation) but also
within the same interview. That is, individual scientists regularly characterised events and their beliefs about them in quite contradictory ways during the course of an interview. Gilbert and Mulkay recognised that variability was a pervasive feature of accounts of actions and events, and it has since been documented in a variety of different sorts of accounts (e.g. Potter and Wetherell’s (1987) discussion of racist attitudes in accounts, and Wetherell et al’s (1987) discussion of discourses concerning gender and employment opportunities). The extent of variability within accounts clearly poses a problem for conventional forms of analysis which seek to provide a definitive account of action or belief.

Following from their acknowledgment of the existence of variability within accounts Gilbert and Mulkay argued that there is a fundamental flaw in the assumption made in traditional methodologies that data obtained from interviews and questionnaires provide access to some external social reality. Rather participants’ descriptions of any state of affairs are partial and selective representations. Even when speakers are describing the most routine and commonplace events or states of affairs they have a wide range of alternative descriptions from which to choose. For instance Schegloff (1972) has noted that for any object there are a range of terms which could be used to describe its (geographical) location. He illustrates this by detailing the range of terms he could use to formulate where his notes are, ranging from 'right in front of me' to 'in the United States' with each of the terms being in some sense correct. He argues that the sort of considerations that enter into the selection of a particular formulation are of analytic interest. Referring to something or describing something involves the practical tasks of selecting and assembling. Thus any description is a construction, built from the range of words and phrases that could legitimately have been used.

The implication is that when people respond in an interview or on a questionnaire they are not merely providing a neutral commentary upon some feature of the world, but are doing things in and with their spoken and written statements. For instance they might be making complaints, justifying their position, blaming others, seeking sympathy or approval. All of these are actions. Gilbert and Mulkay suggest that rather than attempting to use accounts to interpret and describe some reality which is deemed to exist independently of them, it
is more fruitful to analyze the accounts themselves, to explore how specific versions are formulated and why. So, the account itself becomes the object of analysis, rather than the individual giving it, or the subject which they are talking about. Discourse analysis deals explicitly with the constructed and functional character of accounts, and addresses directly the variability within them.

**Disputes about Road Schemes as Discursive Acts**

Discourse analysis has been used to explore the dimensions of a range of different sorts of debates or disputes (e.g. Gilbert and Mulkay (1984), use it to analyze a controversy within biochemistry, Potter and Reicher (1987) use it to explore contrasting press accounts of a 'riot', and Macnaghten (1993) uses it to explore arguments about what nature is). Edwards and Potter (1992) suggest that peoples' talk about social conflicts is not simply a commentary on some external state of affairs, but actively constructs and fashions the conflict itself. They use discourse analysis to analyze public political discourse concentrating on issues such as how events are described and explained, how factual reports are constructed and how cognitive states are attributed. They argue that in public debates and conflicts 'the events that take place are inextricable from their various constructions' (1992:1).

From the beginning debates about road schemes are played out in spoken and written discourse in a variety of forms. The DoT and their consultants issue press notices and publish and exhibit maps and plans. Individuals are invited to complete questionnaires about the choice of route and to write to the Secretary of State with objections and comments on the DoT’s plans. Action and Residents’ Groups hold public meetings, put up posters and distribute pamphlets. At the Public Inquiry individuals and groups are invited to present written or spoken submissions of objection or support. Finally the inspector sums up the arguments made and issues raised in his report. Media, political and public debate continues beyond the inquiry. In this case study local groups prepared petitions, spoke to and wrote to the local press, wrote to their local MPs and representatives of the DoT, held public meetings and distributed pamphlets - all of these activities are discursive acts.
The practices that individuals and groups deploy to warrant the authenticity of their own account, or to suggest that another's version is untrustworthy, constitute the very site of the dispute. The issue of whether an account appears to be factual, is robust, or insidiously undermines alternative accounts is not simply an issue of academic interest but is something of which participants are aware and take account. During the public inquiry it is obviously important for participants that their accounts of how the road will affect them manage to gain the Inspector's attention, and in later claims making about the impacts of the road participants are obviously concerned that their accounts are persuasive both to other local people and to the DoT. They recognise that the way in which they construct their accounts of impact may have practical implications for the outcome of the dispute. Thus in order to understand and describe such disputes it makes sense for sociologists to study the organisation and construction of the language employed.

**Social Constructionism and the Analysis of Language**

A theme which recurs in recent reconsiderations of social constructionism within the social problems area is that greater attention should be paid to the 'discursive production of social problems' (Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993).

Ibarra and Kitsuse's mission is to clarify and update the agenda for the study of social problems outlined initially by Spector and Kitsuse. They claim that Spector and Kitsuse's original statement did not provide a sufficiently clear theoretical direction for studies of the social construction of social problems with the result that many avowedly constructionist studies have focused on what claims making is about (i.e. poverty, crime, child abuse) rather than developing theories of the process of the production of social problems. In order to direct research towards studying the process of claims making they advocate rhetoric as the focus for contemporary constructionism.

For clarity Ibarra and Kitsuse suggest that the term 'putative problem' which Spector and Kitsuse used to denote the attitude of indifference to the 'reality' of the problem, should be replaced with the term 'condition-category'. They argue that the focus on 'putative problems' has led to confusion and lack of direction within the field, because the term 'social problem' does:
double service: it is now a member's then a sociologist's concept. (1993:28)

and also because Spector and Kitsuse's proposal has often been interpreted as recommending that sociologists study what claims making is 'about' rather than focusing on the features of the claims making process. They define condition categories as follows:

Condition-categories are typifications of socially circumscribed activities and processes - the 'society's' classification of its own contents - used in practical contexts to generate meaningful descriptions and evaluations of social reality...they are the terms used by members to propose what the social problem is 'about'. (ibid:30)

Thus they envisage that this new term will draw attention to debates between members over what the problem is 'really about', the practices and strategies they use to shape and produce social problems. This involves the study of the language of claims making.

The research programme they outline consists of drawing up and refining ideal types of the rhetorical dimensions of social problems discourse. They suggest that such a focus on the 'vernacular resources' which participants draw upon in claims making activities offers more potential for developing a coherent theory of social problems activity than does the continued provision of studies of 'the social construction of X, Y & Z' (ibid:32-33). They suggest that there may be common ways of speaking and reasoning used when people make social problems claims regardless of the condition-category used, and distinguish four dimensions of claims making which sociologists might consider:

- rhetorical idioms - these situate the condition-category into a moral dimension, for instance in terms of loss, unreason or unfairness;

- counter rhetoric - used to oppose or counter claims;

- motifs - figures of speech which act as shorthand descriptions or evaluations of the condition-category, for instance plague, diaster or tragedy;

- claims making styles - for instance whether claims are made in a legalistic, comic or scientific style.
Within each of these four dimensions Ibarra and Kitsuse identify a range of rhetorical resources which they suggest are common in claims making about social problems. They acknowledge that:

The inventory of specific idioms, styles and so forth that we offer is composed of ideal types and thus stands to be refined, reformulated and elaborated upon through empirical observation and further theoretical reflection. (ibid:34)

Their recommendation is that researchers take their ideal type model of rhetorical resources and use it to interpret the data they collect on claims making about a particular problem or problems.

While applauding the recognition that social constructionism should focus on the language of claims making, others have taken a different tack. For example Marlaire and Maynard (1993) and Holstein and Miller (1993) urge a more ethnomethodological approach, insisting that research should explicate the details of everyday interactional matters. Such studies would concentrate on how people handle problems of immediate interest to them rather than focusing (as Ibarra and Kitsuse do) on issues already labelled as social problems by, for instance, policy makers or citizens’ groups. They also suggest that analysis should always start from empirical observation of naturally occurring interaction rather than seeing to what extent the data fit pre-ordained rhetorical patterns.

By providing a discourse analysis of interview data I am steering a path somewhere between these two. Discourse analysis of this sort is informed by the ethnomethodological concern (also central to Marlaire’s and Maynard’s, and Holstein’s and Miller’s work) to explicate actual instances of talk rather than developing typologies of discursive styles. Providing detailed analyses of actual claims would seem a necessary precursor to any attempt to outline the constituent features of claims making as Ibarra and Kitsuse recommend. However the data I will be analyzing is not ordinary conversation (as in Marlaire’s and Maynard’s and Holstein’s and Miller’s work) but are accounts gathered in interviews. Both Holstein and Miller, and Marlaire and Maynard stress the importance of studying the ‘interactional production of concrete instances of social problems’ (Holstein and Miller p152) and, following a traditional conversation analytic path, take the recording of ordinary conversation to provide the best data. In this chapter I will be examining
claims produced in an interview setting, which differs in important ways from naturally occurring conversation. However as the emphasis here is on how claims about a specific 'problem' (noise) are organised rather than more generally on how people use language to handle problems of immediate interest to them, interviews provide the best opportunity of collecting appropriate data. The analysis will concentrate on participants' monologue accounts about noise and will not consider in detail the part that interaction between interviewer and interviewee plays in producing the 'problem' of noise. Wooffitt (1992) acknowledges that the data provided in interviews designed specifically to elicit accounts about a particular event or experience cannot be treated as naturally occurring in the same way as talk that occurs spontaneously in everyday interaction, but he argues that this does not invalidate the use of conversation and discourse analytic methods for these data. He suggests that talk in specific settings is distinct from, but based upon, procedures which are recurrent features of everyday talk. Thus the analysis of interview data contributes to the ethnomethodological programme advocated by Marlaire and Maynard, and Holstein and Miller.

The analysis that follows may be seen as part of the empirical work which Ibarra and Kitsuse encourage in order to test and refine their ideal type model of social problems discourse.

Noise as a 'Fact'.

An interest in the way in which the factual status of events is achieved in participants' talk is firmly established in both conversation analytic and discourse analytic studies. For example Smith (1978) considers how the fact that a young woman is mentally ill is achieved in her friend's account, and Wooffitt (1992) explores how people depict their experiences of paranormal events as factual. This work has direct relevance for sociologists interested in exploring the details of the social construction of environmental or social impacts.

Achieving factual status for the social impact of noise is a 'live issue' (Edwards and Potter 1992) for participants. As discussed in Chapter 5 local people's claims that the road surface generates unacceptable noise have been repeatedly rejected by the DoT who assert
that the problem is not that the road is too noisy but that residents are over sensitive (see p106) In order to make an effective case against this version local people have to establish that their complaints are based on the fact that the road surface generates too much noise, rather than merely being based on the perceptions of sensitive or self interested individuals.

In the following analysis I will concentrate on some of the detailed features of participants' accounts which contribute to the construction of the factual status of the impact of noise. The extracts considered here are from parts of interviewees' accounts in which they discuss the impact of noise. I will consider first how the reality and intrusiveness of the noise is provided for through descriptions of the way in which everyday activities have been affected, and will then briefly consider two ways in which the noise is constructed as extraordinary and hence necessitating corrective action.

**Noise and Everyday Activities**

Both interviewees and survey respondents were asked what effect the noise had on them (if they had claimed that noise was an impact). Although some respondents talked of dramatic effects (nervous breakdowns, loss of business, health effects) they were in a tiny minority; the majority listed a range of everyday activities which they could no longer enjoy. Common complaints were that they could no longer sit in their gardens, talk to neighbours over the garden fence, sit inside with windows open, or hear the radio in the car when travelling over the concrete surface. For instance:

HH You just can't have the windows open at the back, it really is so noisy, and of course if you go into the garden...it's very difficult to talk to people you know.

HL The worst thing is summer nights, you can't open the windows at the back of the house at all, just cannot.

HQ *(those affected)* can still not sit in their gardens during the summer months, those that live close to the road, and this is a total change in their lifestyle.

Complaints were overwhelmingly about such changes to mundane activities rather than what might be thought of as more serious consequences. Claimants provided details of the measures they had been 'forced' to take in order to engage in their ordinary activities as a result of the noise. I will consider two examples of this:
I think something should be done about this road
Cos there's no two ways about it
I drive a lot
I drive about twenty two thousand miles a year
which is not sort of company rep kind of mileage
but it's more than your average granny who does five thousand miles a year
and this is the noisiest road surface that I know to drive on
I mean for example
I mean when I drive to work in the morning
and when I drive home at night
I am usually listening to radio four with the news programmes
morning and evening
and as I come onto that road I have to turn the volume of my
radio up
cos otherwise what I can hear on a tarmac surface I cannot hear
when I'm running over the concrete surface

In this extract the speaker asserts that 'something should be done about this road'. He establishes the fact that he 'drives a lot' and then presents his claim that 'this is the noisiest road surface I know to drive on', before going on to provide an example of his direct experience of the noise. Although there are many interesting points that can be made about lines 1-7 the analysis here will concentrate on lines 8-16 in which he provides a description of the way in which a routine activity is disrupted by the noise.

In this example of the noise he experiences on his trips to and from work he draws attention to the breadth of his experience. In lines 9-10 he emphasises that he drives both morning and evening and this is stressed again in line 12. Thus the example is presented as one that happens routinely rather than being a rare occurrence. The use of the phrase 'when I drive' in lines 9 and in line 10 further implies that what he is describing is something that always happens; he is not drawing attention to one extreme occurrence but something that happens routinely as part of his everyday activity.

He describes how when he drives onto the concrete road he has to turn the volume of his radio up in order to hear it as the volume adequate on a tarmac road is inadequate once he's driving over concrete. In this part of his account he provides very precise details of the mundane activity he is engaged in, in which the noise becomes a salient issue. We learn
what the programme is that he’s listening to (the news programme) what radio station it is on (radio four) and when this happens (morning and evening). Having provided this detailed depiction of an ordinary activity he then describes how the noise intrudes and necessitates the taking of some direct action - he has to turn the volume up if he is to hear the radio.

This structure, a detailed depiction of everyday activities followed by an example of the way noise intrudes and necessitates change, was a common component of a number of other interviews. For instance an ex head-teacher describes the effect of noise on children in the school playground:

2. HI usually the way of getting children when the play time was over was to blow a whistle then
they would all stand still
and then we would say 'make your way to the classrooms'
and that was it
She (a current teacher at the school) said they don’t hear a whistle now
and they have to have a loud hailer
so I mean that was really amazing
that that should have to happen
So it shows there is a lot of noise.

In this excerpt she provides details of the usual procedure for calling children in from play and describes how this has been changed by the advent of noise. Since the road has been operational the ordinary whistle has had (line 6) to be replaced with the rather extreme loud-hailer. As in Watson’s account she asserts that some change had to be made, it was not an option but a necessity. This example like the details of having to turn your radio up is another subtle example of what Sacks (1970) termed a members’ measurement system: it provides an everyday example besides which the level of the noise can be judged. By the DoT’s scientific yardstick the noise may not be judged excessive, yet by everyday comparisons it clearly is - it is too loud for people to continue to do what they used to do, whether that is listening to the radio at the same volume or calling children in with a whistle. That these examples are used to provide some ‘proof’ that the road is noisy is nicely illustrated in line 9 of this excerpt where the speaker states explicitly: 'so it shows that there is a lot of noise'.
Both of the examples considered here are taken from data collected in interviews. However the practice of presenting details of the way in which changes to everyday activities have been 'forced' by the noise are widespread in claims presented in other contexts. For example in a press report a local resident is reported as claiming that the noise has meant that she has 'had to wear ear plugs when pruning the roses' (Chichester Observer 30/8/90), and on questionnaires respondents claimed for instance that 'we have to shout to attract our children's attention in the garden', '(we are) forced to keep windows closed in hot weather' and 'you have to raise your voice to speak to neighbours over the garden fence' (emphasis added).

These examples of the way very ordinary activities are interrupted and affected by noise do three things: first they provide a way of emphasising the extraordinary nature of the noise, secondly they work to bolster the identity of complainants as essentially ordinary people and consequently their complaints as reasonable, and thirdly they contribute to the achievement of facticity for claims that the noise is excessive. I will deal with each point in turn.

i) In 'Telling Tales of the Unexpected' Wooffitt (1992) provides details of a rhetorical device he calls the X/Y device. He describes how, in providing accounts of paranormal experiences, speakers routinely embed the detail of the experience (Y) in recollections of the mundane activity they were engaged in at the time (X). For instance:

as I was going through the doorway (X)
I was just jammed into it (Y) (ibid:118)

Wooffitt argues that by providing details of mundane activities the phenomena described (paranormal experience) are rendered truly extra-ordinary or strange:

That is the strangeness of the phenomenon is made inferentially available through its juxtaposition to the everyday and routine (ibid:143).

Although providing an account about a road being noisy is clearly very different from providing an account of some sort of paranormal experience, there are parallel aims. In both cases the speaker is at pains to stress that the phenomenon (noise, paranormal experience) is real and extraordinary, while at the same time they themselves are ordinary people (inferred by details of ordinary activities). Details of mundane activities provide a
context in which the phenomenon (noise) appears intrusive and extreme. Thus the structure works to warrant the central claim that some action should be taken about the road’s surface. The way in which the noise is actively constructed as something extraordinary will be pursued further in the following section.

ii) As participants in a dispute, respondents face a dilemma: how to make their complaint appear factual and serious, yet at the same time avoid the inference that they are making too much of the issue, that they are over sensitive or overly motivated to complain, or are simply complaining in order to further their own ends (see Chapter 8 for a detailed discussion of the way in which participants attempt to characterise their motives for complaint as laudable). Edwards and Potter suggest that this is often a crucial dilemma for participants in disputes:

> the dilemma of presenting factual reports while being treated as having a stake in some specific version of events or some practical outcome. (1992:3)

In these examples participants’ construction of themselves as people engaged in ordinary activities appears to be part of a strategy designed to counter such an unsympathetic hearing. Depicting in detail the activities disrupted by noise is an implicit way of ‘doing being ordinary’ (Sacks 1984) and hence a way of underlining the legitimacy of their complaint - it is what anyone would complain about. The use of ‘ordinary claims’ recurs throughout the process of the construction of social impacts and will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

iii) Potter and Edwards (1992) note that by providing detailed descriptive accounts of events speakers warrant the authority of their accounts. They use the example of a controversial briefing between the then British Chancellor, Nigel Lawson, and a group of journalists. Press reports after the meeting announced that a major alteration was to be made in benefits payable to old age pensioners. The following day Nigel Lawson claimed that he had not said any such thing. A debate followed in the press over what had actually gone on at the briefing and who was telling the truth. Potter and Edwards suggest that one of the resources used by journalists to justify their account of the briefing was the provision of detailed descriptions of the physical lay-out of the room in which the meeting was held. They propose that this level of description works to suggest direct perception or fresh visual
memory on the part of the reporter and is 'an accomplishment in the rhetoric of truth telling' (1992:206). In the data presented above, the provision of details of the mundane activities which are interrupted by noise work to create a strong sense of the respondents' direct perception or first hand knowledge of the problem. The respondent is located as a direct observer of the problem and hence her/his observations may be granted greater validity than the distanced assumptions of the DoT.

**Noise as Extraordinary**

In the previous section it was argued that by describing the effect of noise on everyday activities its factual status and disruptive character is provided for. In this section I will explore two other ways in which noise is constructed as extraordinary and thus requiring attention. First I will examine excerpts in which speakers mark the noise apart from other expected impacts, and will then discuss excerpts in which they assert that they could not have anticipated the kind of noise generated by the surface.

**Noise as Distinct from Other Impacts**

In depicting the noise as different from 'ordinary impacts' it is rendered more serious and thus in need of corrective action. In addition by stressing the extremity of noise this strategy provides grounds for the existence and maintenance of protest; the effort involved in protest appears appropriate given the extent of the problem.

3. **HBii**

1. I'm not a sort of shrinking sensitive plant as it were when it comes to sort of being sensitive about noise
2. Like Mike I've lived an awful lot of my life in warships
3. where you've got ventilation fans going the whole time
4. and in many ways it's it's similar to that as a sort of permanent background noise
5. and I got used to that
6. but I still find the noise of this road an intrusion

The excerpt begins with an implicit identity claim in which the speaker distinguishes himself from people who are 'sensitive about noise' (lines 1-2). This sets up his account as that of a reasonable person and succinctly counters the DoT's insinuation that complaints are a result of resident's sensitivity to noise, rather than of the extremity of the noise. This characterisation of himself is warranted by the provision of evidence of his wide experience of putting up with noise (lines 3-5). He then contrasts this noise he 'got used to' with the
noise of the A27 which he ‘still find(s)...an intrusion’.

In lines 3 & 4 he provides some evidence to back up his claim that he is not overly sensitive to noise, referring to his experience of living on board warships which had ‘ventilation fans going the whole time’. Attention is drawn to the extent of his experience; we are told that he lived ‘an awful lot’ of his life on warships and that the fans were ‘going the whole time’. Thus his position is presented as being grounded on extensive evidence.

He then goes on to claim that the noise of the A27 is similar to the noise of the ventilation fans in that it too is ‘a permanent background noise’. Drawing parallels between the noise of the A27 and other extreme noises was a common practice both in interviews and on the survey questionnaires. For instance the noise was often likened to living close to an airport or race track. In this instance having suggested that the two noises are at least in one respect similar the speaker goes on to draw a distinction between them; he was able to get used to the former while he still finds the latter ‘an intrusion’. Through this contrast the A27 noise is constructed as extraordinary; it is quite different to other sorts of extreme noise.

Lines 3-7 comprise a classic contrast structure (Smith 1978) in which the first part provides a rule whereby the second part is constructed as odd. In the first part of this contrast we receive information about the normal response to permanent background noise - to get used to it. This is contrasted with the odd response elicited by the A27, it has not been ‘got used to’ but is still considered an intrusion. However the speaker has taken care to show that it is not he who is extraordinary for not being able to get used to the noise (he has explicitly told us that he is not overly sensitive to noise and given an example to validate this claim), rather it is the noise itself that is extraordinary and can not be ‘got used to’.

This implicit suggestion that the normal response to impacts is to ‘get used to them’ but that this was not possible in the case of the A27 noise was also made in other accounts.
but as far as the school

to my knowledge haven't kicked up an enormous fuss about the road

so I presume like the rest of us they have learnt to live with it

and I think that's what you do

big change in the environment and you just got to put up with it

you can't just grouse at it for evermore

got to learn to live with it

and I think that's probably what the schools are doing

but of course the noise is another matter

In this extract the speaker is responding to a question about whether he considers that the road has had any significant impacts on the local primary school. He had been a prominent objector to the DoT's route at the public inquiries and a central feature of his case had been the way in which children at the local school would be affected by exhaust fumes. In this excerpt he states that as far as he knows the school has not complained about this effect. Their response, not 'kicking up an enormous fuss' is presented as the appropriate response to environmental impacts. He assumes that they 'have learnt to live with it' and asserts that this is a reasonable response: 'I think that's what you do' (line 4).

In stressing that this is the appropriate response he implicitly counters the possible assumption that lack of complaint equates with lack of impact. Indeed he suggests in line 7 that the school has been faced with a 'big change in the environment'. Thus his earlier claims that the school would face significant impacts are not invalidated, he claims that they have faced 'big environmental impacts' but that they have responded appropriately and 'learnt to live with it'. Having built up this depiction of appropriate response to impact he then introduces the case of noise which he claims 'is another matter' (line 9). Noise is assigned to a different category of impacts, it is constructed as entirely different and thus the rule of how one should respond to ordinary impacts does not apply to it.

The following excerpt reinforces the notion that there is an implicit convention for dealing with 'ordinary' impacts but that this does not apply in the case of the noise:
5. HJ

I must admit that my and our sort of interest in the road is fairly one-track just the noisy aspect.
I think I am quite sure that if they made it as quiet as some roads are that sort of class of road that we would live with it.
I am sure we could.

This speaker is the leader of an action group and here he claims that the group is only concerned about the noise and are not interested in other effects of the road. He suggests that if the noise had been an ordinary impact ('as quiet as some roads are') then they would have adopted the normal response ('we would live with it'). He emphasises this point saying that if the road noise were in that category ('that sort of class of road') then he is sure they could live with it (line 6). There is an implicit suggestion here that as the road is not 'that sort of class of road' they cannot adopt this response.

Noise as Something Which Could Not be Anticipated

In this section I will present some extracts in which interviewees assert that they had not anticipated the extent of the noise before the road was built and, moreover, they could not have done so. Depicting noise in this way attends to two concerns: First it provides a reason or justification for individuals not having been actively concerned about this impact before the road was constructed, as they argue that they could not have anticipated it, and secondly it contributes to the construction of the noise as extraordinary (it was beyond anticipation) thus legitimising protest and necessitating remedial action.

6. HG

We cos I lived before fairly near it
and we had the railway embankment between ourselves and the road
and we thought we shall be alright
Actually we moved before the road was finished so I don't know what it would be like living there
but I know now that the other people who live in the same road they have all had compensation and double-glazing done so we would have been miles too near.

In this extract the speaker provides a contrast between what he expected the noise of the road to be like which might be summarised as 'alright' (line 3) and the reality of the noise which has proved to be not alright as evidenced by the need for compensation and double glazing. His assumption that those who lived in the area would be 'alright' is presented not
as a naive assumption but as based on his own experience of living close to both a road and a railway and thus on considerable exposure to noise. As in the last section the noise from the A27 is distinguished from ordinary or expected noise and rendered extraordinary. The fact that the road has proved to be noisy is depicted as wholly unexpected on the basis of past experience, as something which there was no reason to expect. A contrast is presented between what was reasonably expected ('we shall be alright') and the reality of the situation ('we would have been miles too near').

The next speaker provides a parallel account of her failure to anticipate the problem of noise:

7. **HP** (I=interviewer).

1  I: And you knew at the time you moved here that a road was proposed ?
2  HP: Oh yes it has been on the books for years and years and years.
3  I: But that didn't affect your choice did it?
4  HP: No because we had lived on the old A27 and very close in fact on the corner of (village)
5  and we were used to the noise of cars going by
6  and we also had three children at one stage
7  so we are not squeamish about things like that.

She too asserts that she had experience of noisy environments having lived 'very close' to the old A27 and also being accustomed to the noise produced by three children. Like HG (extract 6) she portrays herself as someone not overly concerned about noise declaring herself 'not squeamish about things like that' and as someone who would have been prepared to tolerate a degree of noise. Later in the interview she notes that her initial assumptions that noise would not be a problem were unfounded and provides an account for this:

8. **HP**

1  IHP: But it was strange the fact that we thought it wouldn't be as bad as it is
2  I: Because you thought you knew what traffic noise was like?
3  HP: Yes I mean it's not the same as normal traffic noise pootling along a country
4  lane
5  actually the A27 wasn't a country lane went through (village) and (village)
6  it was a busy road but it had a normal surface

Here she justifies her assumption that the noise would not be excessive by distinguishing the new A27 from the old A27 which she describes as a busy road but one with a 'normal
surface'. Thus both her complaint and that of HG are presented not as a complaint about living close to a busy road but a complaint about the extraordinary condition of this particular road. Had the road been 'normal' there would have been no reason to anticipate any notable problem.

These invocations of past experience of living next to busy roads serve to counter the DoT’s position. As outlined above the DoT argue that the problem lies not with the surface but with local people’s unfamiliarity with proximity to busy roads. This version of events is explicitly refuted in the above extracts. Speakers draw attention to their experience of 'ordinary' road noise and thus undermine the assumption that they were simply unprepared for noise and will eventually get used to it.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have used a discourse analytic approach to explore how social impact claims about the A27 roar were constructed. This analysis has implications for three distinct areas: it contributes an action perspective to research on the 'powerlessness' of members of the public in planning disputes, it provides an alternative assessment of the impact of noise, and contributes to the refinement, reformulation and elaboration of Ibarra and Kitsuse’s framework for analyzing the discursive production of social problems. These points are elaborated below.

Existing analyses of the place of ordinary people in planning disputes have drawn attention to their relative powerlessness in the face of the experts and the planners (Wynne 1982, Hutton 1986, and see page 67). The system is characterised as inherently unfair and ordinary people depicted as having decisions imposed upon them against their wishes. The analysis presented in this chapter does not address this issue of the existence of structural inequalities between planners and the public, but draws attention to the way in which participants themselves can describe their position in just this way. Participants were shown to describe themselves as having to change aspects of their everyday lives in response to the impact of noise. They use the idea of powerlessness and enforced change in their construction of the impact as real and serious. This analysis should be seen as complimenting rather than challenging more structural analyses of planning disputes.
However the recognition that ordinary people are active participants in such disputes and utilise a range of strategies in their fight is an important one and will be developed further in the following chapters.

Existing summaries of research on the impact of noise draw attention to effects such as hearing loss, sleep interference and psychological effects (Finsterbusch 1980, Vidal 1993). However little attention seems to have been paid to consideration of how those who claim to be affected by noise describe its effects on them. In the interviews reported here this question was asked and the answers received focused on changes to details of everyday life - not being able to hold a conversation in the garden, having to close windows or having to turn the radio up. Rather than attempting to construct the impact as serious by reference to dramatic effects such as hearing loss or psychological damage, participants used these changes to mundane activities as evidence of the reality and severity of the impact. There are two points to be made about this; first that for those affected social impacts are those things which disrupt everyday life, and secondly that those who claim to be affected by noise describe its impact in different ways from those who research its impact. Both of these points are tentative and require further exploration.

The discussion in the previous chapter revealed that local people’s claims had a distinct moral element to them; they claimed that it was unfair that they should have to suffer noise as it was the result of a mistake by the DoT, and a consequence of their misguided attempt to save money. The DoT attempted to counter this rhetoric of unfairness and bad treatment by providing an alternative formulation of what the problem was ‘about’; they claimed that there was no problem with the road surface but that there was a problem of people being overly sensitive and unprepared for noise. Ibarra and Kitsuse’s model of rhetorical idioms and counter rhetorics seems to describe these strategies well. However it does not do justice to the dynamism of the process of the construction of social problems and the flexibility of accounting practices. Discourse analysis draws attention to the degree of variability within and between accounts and to the way participants’ accounts shift to address different interactional aims. In the accounts analyzed above we see some of the accounting practices which participants utilise to counter the DoT’s counter-rhetoric to their initial claims. They are not simply claiming that there is a problem but are at pains to
establish their claims that the road surface is too noisy as factual, and thus to undermine the accusation that they are simply overly sensitive. Thus the construction of a social problem or impact is an ongoing interactive process with the rhetoric and accounting practices used being shaped and developed in response to those used by 'the other side'.

Ibarra and Kitsuse's notion of claims making styles is also relevant here. Their aim is to identify styles which are evident across the range of social problems discourse and they provide a list of different styles which they hope will be developed through empirical observation (1993:34). The styles they list are as follows: scientific style, civic style, comic style, theatrical style, legalistic style, and subcultural style, and they provide a brief discussion of what each might involve. The way in which local people in the dispute about the A27 roar make their claims could be categorised as an example of the civic style of claims making. Ibarra and Kitsuse write that:

The civic style of claims-making entails making claims that have what we might call 'the look of being unpolished'. That is the civic styles distinctive character is based in being 'honest', 'sincere', 'upright', 'unstylised'...it involves trading off an ideal of the 'common decent folk'. (ibid:52)

In the analysis above I have show how participants incorporate details of mundane activities into their accounts of noise and argue that this: places the noise in contrast to the everyday activities and consequently renders it extraordinary and warranting attention; works to provide positive identities for claimants as ordinary people; and conveys a sense that respondents are direct observers of the problems and hence better equipped to assess its nature and extent than the distanced DoT. These invocations of ordinary identity and references to mundane activities may be an important resource in making social impact claims. This idea can be considered as part of the elaboration of their ideal type which Ibarra and Kitsuse recommend and will be further developed in the following chapters.
Chapter 7

The Use of Identity Claims in the Construction of Social Impacts: Being Ordinary.

In the previous chapter I used discourse analysis to explicate the construction of claims made by interviewees in the Havant-Chichester case study about the A27 'roar'. In the following two chapters I continue with this approach and use it to analyze further aspects of the discursive production of the social impacts of the two roads studied. The focus throughout will be on how, in the process of making claims about impact, participants use certain representations of their own identity and to what ends they do so. I will concentrate particularly on various forms of invocation of ordinary identity and of attempts to distinguish self from others, and own position from others'. In this chapter the focus is on how participants identify themselves as 'ordinary people' and use this to distinguish themselves and their own position clearly from that of the DoT and their consultants. The data analyzed in this chapter are claims made by objectors in their written submissions to the first Havant-Chichester Inquiry, and claims made by interviewees in the Worthing-Lancing study. The following chapter also deals with issues of identity, but concentrates on how participants seek to distinguish themselves and their stance from other 'ordinary people' involved in the planning dispute.

Identity Claims and the Achievement of Divisions

As outlined in Chapter 4 the majority of research on conflicts about planning focuses on features of the inquiry process. One of the recurrent themes in this literature is that the process is unfair as the relationship between 'experts' and 'ordinary people' is unequal. For instance in road scheme inquiries objectors seldom have the money to employ their own technical experts, and even when this is possible they are unlikely to be able to undertake extensive traffic surveys and projections to compete with the DoT's forecasts. In addition they are often unable to decipher and counter the technical evidence produced by the DoT, and lack the knowledge and resources to present their case in a similar expert, empirical fashion. The objectors' status as lay or ordinary people is assumed to somehow determine
and constrain their performance within the public inquiry placing them at a disadvantage to the 'experts'.

More sophisticated sociological analyses of planning disputes have been provided by Wynne (1982) and Hutton (1986). Both concentrate on the public inquiry; Wynne provides a case study of the Windscale Inquiry of 1977 into British Nuclear Fuel's (BNFL) application to build a Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant (THORP) at Sellafield, and Hutton analyses an inquiry also held in 1977 into Shell-Expro's plans to construct a Natural Gas Liquids processing plant at Moss Moran near Peterhead in Scotland. Both authors draw attention to the way in which the issue is constructed differently by the different parties at the inquiry, and both pay attention to differences in the content and style of their participation. Both emphasise that for objectors the issues are framed in moral and political terms, while for the project proponents and the inspector they are presented as simply technical. These case studies draw attention to the way in which the 'facts' of the public inquiry are socially constructed. However they concentrate on how the dominance of the 'experts', in terms of external power and relations within the inquiry, enable them to determine what counts as fact and thus ultimately to determine the outcome of the inquiry. In neither of these case studies are the categorisations of 'ordinary people' (or lay objectors) and 'experts' subject to any scrutiny - they are implicitly assumed to be objective descriptions of the participants which determine and constrain their actions and expectations in certain ways.

This notion that membership of a category group (expert/ordinary) structures interaction in a relatively straightforward and unproblematic way is widespread. Maynard notes the way in which externally based patterns of inequality or difference are assumed somehow to:

automatically reproduce themselves as embedded, pervasive and omnirelevant features of people's direct interrelations. (1988:317)

The relationship between interaction and social structure is a complex one which comprises the central problem for much social theory. I will draw attention briefly here to two approaches which challenge the idea that external structures of inequality simply exert an influence on interaction in a straightforward way, and make a case instead for concentrating on how those involved in interaction employ particular characterisations of themselves and
of each other, and to what ends.

Ethnomethodologists’ focus on members’ methods has often led to the criticism that they assume that actors proceed unconstrained by social structure. Schegloff (1991) however deals specifically with the relationship between what goes on in interaction and social structure. He acknowledges that even the most casual observation of interaction provides a strong sense that there are occasions when who the parties are relative to each other seems to matter, and importantly, to matter to them. These senses of ‘who they are’ connect to what is ordinarily meant by social structure, focusing for instance on the participants’ relative status or power, their membership of gender, ethnic or age groups. However, he argues that the question is not whether such things matter, or even whether they affect interaction, rather it is how to produce a defensible empirical analysis which demonstrates their significance. This position is based on the simple observation that there are many possible categorisations for any individual. For example the same person may be variously described as a woman, a white person, a sociologist etc., with all of the descriptions being correct. Thus he argues that:

Some principle of relevance must underlie the use of a reference form and has to be adduced in order to provide for one rather than another of those ways of characterising or categorising some member. (1991:50)

His solution is that the characterisation of participants must be that which can be shown to be demonstrably relevant to the participants themselves in their production and interpretation of the interaction in which they are involved.

The other approach to the relationship between structure and action which is useful here is Giddens’ concept of the duality of structure. Rather than viewing social structure as something external which exercises constraint upon interaction, he conceptualises it as both ‘medium and outcome’ (1984:25) of social interaction. Thus the detailed analysis of interaction is an important part of understanding how social structure is reproduced or challenged. While Hutton explicitly uses Giddens’ structuration theory as a framework for his analysis of the Moss-Moran inquiry, he does not consider the role of the invocation and contestation of identity.
Recognising the importance of how participants in planning disputes present and represent themselves and others does not constitute a rejection of the idea that there are structural inequalities which shape such disputes. What it does is draw attention to the fact that identity is an important issue for participants in disputes, not just to analysts, and also provides new insights into the dynamics and organisation of such disputes. In the analysis which follows the identities of for instance 'ordinary person', 'local person' or 'expert' are not taken to be unproblematic descriptions of participants, rather attention is drawn to the identities which participants themselves invoke and utilise.

The analysis concentrates on how participants identify themselves as 'ordinary people', and suggests that this is an important resource for them. Contrary to the assumption in previous studies that being an 'ordinary person' is a disadvantage, I will show it to be an identity which participants actively claim and use strategically. Three dimensions of the invocation of ordinary identity are considered. First participants' refutation of expertise, secondly their reliance on 'common knowledge' and finally their characterisation of themselves as a distinct group with a different outlook and values to those of the 'experts'.

**Being an Ordinary Person**

An interest in the way in which speakers describe their activities and themselves as 'normal' or 'ordinary' in order to achieve specific interactional goals stems from the work of Sacks. He argues that rather than applying the notion of an 'ordinary person' to this or that person it should be considered as the way somebody constitutes themselves.

> It is not that somebody is ordinary; it is perhaps that it is what one's business is, and it takes work, as any other business does (1984 (1970):414)

Sack's work focused on how people do 'being ordinary', and explored particularly how people may claim membership of the category 'ordinary people' without making explicit reference to it. For instance they may present their experiences or actions so as to make them appear mundane or usual rather than in any way extraordinary or unusual. Sack's preliminary observations have been developed in subsequent research. For instance Jefferson's (1984) study of the way in which people who have had extraordinary experiences work to produce unexceptional versions of the events, and Wooffitt's (1991) analysis of how people who claim to have had paranormal experiences warrant their
normality. Wooffitt and Widdicombe (1990) explored the use of the category 'ordinary' in written discourse, focusing on its use in newspaper articles, and also noted that ordinariness is routinely claimed for individuals whose normality may be disputable in some way.

The following analysis builds on this work, exploring how objectors present themselves as 'ordinary' in contrast to the alternative category of experts, and how they characterise their viewpoint as ordinary common sense. I will suggest that these invocations of ordinary identity attend to a range of important interactional goals.

In their written submissions to the first Havant/Chichester inquiry (see p81) a number of objectors explicitly drew attention to their lack of expertise and used the identity of an 'ordinary person' to make strong claims about the potential impacts of the proposed road. For instance:

1. **195**
   You will be hearing from expert pollution witnesses later on in this inquiry. They will be more able than I to provide you with research evidence on the effects of vehicle pollution on schoolchildren. However, I feel it is necessary to draw your attention to the concern of parents and teachers over the risk of pollution. We all know that motor vehicles emit a lot of poisonous and noxious chemicals from their exhausts.

2. **195**
   I don't know much more than the ordinary parent about the risks of pollution, but what I know makes me very concerned about the proximity of the first school in particular. Much of this school, as I've already indicated, is less than 100 metres from the proposed road. And this seems to be just the area which is vulnerable to the effects of pollution, particularly lead pollution.

3. **232a**
   I am not qualified to discuss in detail pollution from lead and other chemicals. I do know, however, that there is controversy over both the effects of lead on growing children and the concentrations which cause those effects.

4. **223a**
   I have not got the expertise to criticise the principles of the procedure used to evaluate the new road. But I would point out that as far as I know the construction of the new (road) would create a stretch of road from (place name) to (place name) - all motorway or dual carriageway - on which there is no service area.
All of these extracts consist of an explicit refutation of any claim to expertise on the subject under discussion: 'expert pollution witnesses...will be more able than I to provide you with research evidence on the effects of vehicle pollution on schoolchildren', 'I don’t know much more than the ordinary parent about the risks of pollution', 'I’m not qualified to discuss in detail pollution from lead and other chemicals' and 'I have not got the expertise to criticise the principles of the procedure used to evaluate the new road'. The denial of expert knowledge in each case is followed by a 'but' or 'however' after which the speaker’s claim or concern is voiced.

Hewitt and Stokes identify this construction as a disclaimer, which they define as:

> a verbal device employed to ward off and defeat in advance doubts and negative typifications which may result from intended conduct. (1975:3)

According to Hewitt and Stokes, disclaimers reveal speakers' recognition that what they are about to say could be used by recipients to make negative inferences about their identity or conduct, and explicitly asks that that inference is not made. So for instance 'I'm not racist but...' displays the speakers' recognition that what they are about to say might lead hearers to infer that they are racist, and seeks to avoid that typification. They note that such disclaimers have two components. The first is an identity claim; the negative typification as a racist is disclaimed, and so the opposite valued identity is claimed. Secondly there is a substantive claim, in their example an expressed belief about the unreasonable demands made by black people. They argue that people use disclaimers in order to secure the success of substantive claims, but without the possible negative implications for their identity claims.

However Hewitt and Stokes go on to suggest that the 'I'm not an expert, but..' disclaimer has a distinct use, which they call 'hedging':

>'I'm no expert' is a phrase that conveys to others the idea that no expert identity is being claimed; if no expertise is, in fact, shown, no claim needs to be defended. The phrase signals to hearers that they should treat factually faulty statements or deeds that have the wrong effects as the normal prerogative of people who are not and do not claim to be experts in what they are doing. (ibid:4)

They argue that 'hedging' signals minimal commitment to what follows and indicates its tentative nature, suggesting that speakers who employ 'I'm not an expert, but..' are willing
to receive discrepant information, change opinions, be persuaded otherwise or be better informed' (p4). However they do not provide any data to warrant this interpretation, and in planning disputes of the sort examined here 'I'm not an expert, but...' seems to have a different interactional use. In the data above the disclaimers of expert status rather than being expressions of tentativeness on the objectors' parts, appear to work like 'I'm not a racist' to claim a valued identity and secure the success of following claims.

The disclaimer creates a distinct identity for objectors as different from 'experts' and ensures that their concerns and claims are heard as those of 'ordinary people'. Presenting a concern or complaint as that of an ordinary person may give it a special strength. By presenting their complaints as explicitly not those of experts, objectors request that their submissions should not be criticised in the way that expert statements would be. Expert or pseudo-expert assessments of the danger of pollution lend themselves to easy refutation by the Department of Transport. However the concerns of 'ordinary people' cannot be criticised on the basis of facticity or dismissed lightly.

Within the quasi-legal context of the public inquiry objectors' identity comes under close scrutiny. In cross examination the barrister for the DoT will attempt to throw doubt on objectors' credibility, and thus on the strength of their case, by questioning their experience and background, and their technical competence (University of Surrey Workshop on being an expert witness 1994). Who objectors 'are' is extremely important to the success of their objection. By explicitly identifying themselves as ordinary people objectors make relevant their stock of common sense and common concerns while resisting attacks on their technical competence to speak.

Previous analyses (see p67 & p136) argue that objectors are at a disadvantage because they are unable to challenge the Department’s experts, but equally the Department cannot effectively challenge the authority of 'ordinary people' to talk about their concerns for their community. By establishing themselves as 'ordinary people' objectors claim a relevant authority for their statements.

In addition, by presenting their concerns as those of ordinary people and not those of
experts, concern over lead pollution, for example, is presented as being of widespread concern and not simply of academic interest. In the first extract the speaker aligns with the concern of ordinary parents and teachers about the effects of lead pollution on schoolchildren. The implicit suggestion is that if even ordinary people are worried about the threat of lead pollution then that concern should be taken seriously - the concern is constructed as both grave and widespread.

Thus 'I'm not an expert, but...' may be viewed as a device which protects objectors' claims from technical criticism, anticipates and averts the criticism that their case is unreliable as it is not expert, and sets up the following speech as that of an 'ordinary person' consequently providing a source of legitimate authority for speakers and working to secure the success of their complaints.

Common Knowledge

Another way of invoking ordinary identity is by claiming that one's account is based on common knowledge. In these data two forms of this are apparent; presenting accounts as what 'anyone' would say, and as what 'we all know'.

One of the disadvantages that objectors are said to face at public inquiries is their lack of access to the resources and 'evidence' that the 'other side' have. However they can lay claim to an alternative valuable resource - common knowledge. By virtue of their occasioned identity as 'ordinary people' objectors are qualified to speak of what is common knowledge, what ordinary people know from experience.

Presenting an account in terms of what 'anyone would say' or what 'we all know' broadens the basis for the particular version of events, and helps to warrant its facticity. Individuals giving such accounts claim for themselves membership of a larger group of ordinary people, and thus avert the possible inference that their account is simply that of a cranky or overly motivated individual. Edwards and Potter (1992) write that when there is a controversial issue at stake participants are caught up in a dilemma of interest - how to provide accounts which attend to their interests without being undermined as interested (see p126). One way of doing this is by claiming that the account provided is 'anyone's' account. The events
being described are presented as what 'anyone' would make of them rather than the interpretation of one individual, and thus are attributed some sort of objective status.

Objections made on the basis of what is common knowledge may be particularly difficult to undermine. Objectors present their complaints in an environment where they can more or less guarantee that the Department will be hostile to what they have to say, and where persuading the Inspector of the validity of their case is of paramount importance. Complaints about the likely impacts of the scheme which appeal to common knowledge are likely to achieve at least tacit affiliation from recipients. The complaint is presented as something which does not need to be precisely formulated because it is so commonplace - it is true by definition. Edwards and Potter point out that such claims to common knowledge are neat in that they invoke a wide range of consensual knowers without giving any particulars about who they are that could potentially be contested (1992:146). Drew and Holt (1988) make a similar observation in their research on the use of idioms, that such expressions have a special robustness. Idioms are resistant to being challenged with concrete empirical facts and this quality makes them useful when presenting complaints in inauspicious environments. In objectors’ submissions to the public inquiry vague formulations which draw on what 'anyone' would say or what 'we all know' may be particularly difficult to challenge as their implications are less open to rebuttal than explicit statements are.

What 'Anyone' Would Say

5. 210
Mr. Holland has stated in his paper on behalf of the Department that the preferred route has been selected after 'full consideration of all the factors involved'. This is reassuring, is it not? Any member of the public would take this to mean that every question has been investigated and evaluated by experts in every relevant field. I must say to you, sir, that in respect of Emsworth, I have seen no evidence in the published statements that the Department has spent even five minutes on considering either the most appropriate line for the road, or the most vital factor, the effect on Emsworth as a community.
6. What they do not indicate, for example, is the considerable extent to which the present A27 - not only the dual carriageway around Havant but also the single carriageway through Emsworth - operates well below its full capacity for something like 95% of the week for most weeks of the year. This is, I think, quite apparent to anyone, like myself, whose job requires them to travel either before or after both the morning and evening rush hours.

7. If all car owners were actually motor-cycle owners one would guess that hardly any new road construction would have been needed over the past 10-15 years. But even a trend towards smaller cars must have a major impact on the capacity of existing roads and the need for new ones - as any driver of a mini will tell you.

8. I appreciate that the station is itself noisy when a train is passing through, but this only occurs about 6 times an hour, and to anyone waiting for a train this is a welcome sound rather than unwanted noise.

In extract 5 the speaker is beginning to challenge the DoT’s claim that there has been full consideration of all the factors involved. He argues that the DoT’s statement would lead 'any member of the public' to believe that the evaluation had been thorough, the effect of the road on Emsworth as a community has received insufficient attention. His criticism of the DoT therefore rests on the assertion that their statement was false; they said one thing, but did another. His claim that 'any member of the public' would interpret the statement as meaning that 'every question has been investigated and evaluated by experts in every relevant field' ensures that it is understood that it was not that he simply misinterpreted the meaning of the statement; 'anyone' would have taken it to mean the same thing.

In extract 6 the claim that the road operates well below its full capacity for the majority of the time is presented as 'apparent to anyone' who travels outside of rush hours. In extract 7 the claim that a trend toward smaller cars would have an impact on the capacity of existing roads and the need for new ones is presented as what 'any driver of a mini would tell you'. In extract 8 the speaker is making a case against the road being sited close to the station. The DoT argued that the station is already noisy and thus traffic noise would make little difference. The speaker is seeking to distinguish between the 'welcome sound' of an arriving train and the unwelcome intrusion of traffic noise. She argues that the noise of
trains is a welcome sound to 'anyone waiting for a train' - it is not simply her own interpretation.

From this limited number of examples it seems that 'what anyone would make of a situation' is used when the speaker is making a potentially difficult and contentious claim. For instance that the DoT have made a false statement, that the existing road operates below its capacity, that a trend toward smaller cars would avoid the need for new roads, or that there is a distinction between the noise of trains and the noise of traffic. These are all direct refutations of the Department's case and are guaranteed to meet with opposition. Presenting their position as that of 'anyone' works to generate accounts which appear to be undisputable and are consequently less vulnerable to attack.

What 'We All Know'

9. 195
So, we shall have 2,000 to 3,000 lorries and juggernauts passing by every day, less than 100 metres from the children working in the first school and 200 metres from children working in the middle school. And, we all know quite well how dirty and noisy these vehicles are. This is the threat which hangs over the peaceful environment of these two schools. Not only will the children be surrounded by polluted air from this new road, but they will also be subjected to continuous loud and unpleasant traffic noise. Is this the right environment for young children from 5 to 12 years to play in? I don't think one needs any research to prove that this sort of environment cannot be beneficial to our children.

10. 195
We all know that such underpasses attract vandalism, threatening behaviour and sometimes violence. Who does not feel a twinge of anxiety about walking through a subway at night? Where there is an alternative way, without using the subway, we will use it. But, here, in Emsworth there will be no alternative way across the new road, you will either use the underpass or stay where you are.

11. 205
It came as a great shock to me to realise that the road, as planned, would rise far above the railway embankment - which might have provided some protection from a lower sited road - and from this lofty position fumes, filthy fumes, filled with lead deposits would permeate and pollute the good clean air of the playground. We know that lead is particularly detrimental to the health of young children, and there is no doubt that these fumes would deposit lead into the atmosphere.

As the excerpts above demonstrate common knowledge was also invoked by objectors by
reference to what 'we all know'. This formulation was used like 'what anyone would say' to contrast the common knowledge of objectors with the expertise of the planners and to suggest that the former is more valid. If the DoT are promoting a scheme in which a road runs close to a school when 'we all know' that vehicles are noisy and their fumes are dangerous, and a scheme that necessitates the use of underpasses when 'we all know that underpasses are dangerous' then that scheme appears to be lacking in common-sense.

All of the references here to 'what we all know' were preceded by a description of the DoT's plans. Extract nine was preceded by a long calculation of how many vehicles and of what sort were likely to be passing the primary school; extract 10 came after the objector had presented what he called 'a few relevant facts about the subways and underpasses' which drew attention to details such as their proposed length and width; and extract 11 begins with details about the planned elevation of the road. Thus attention is drawn first to familiarity with aspects of the proposed scheme. Objectors display their ability to understand and interpret the DoT's plans before demonstrating that they run counter to common sense. To simply say that the plans made no sense or were wrong without demonstrating familiarity with them would be counterproductive, while providing details of (a version of) them and then contrasting this with 'what we all know' provides a neat dismissal of them.

Where a complaint is made on the basis of 'what we all know' an attempt to refute it has two possible consequences, one of which implicates the individual challenging the claim, the other implicating the individual making the claim. First, it may have the result of excluding the person who refutes the claim from what is assumed to be common knowledge available to all ordinary people, thus placing them in a somewhat deviant and peripheral position. The DoT can counter claims about 'what we all know' by suggesting that there is no evidence to back up the claims, or that they are not reasonable. For example in their reply to submission no. 195 they address the objector's statement (presented here as extract 10) about 'what everyone knows' about subways by arguing that:

with regard to the underpass the Department sees no reason to suppose that the criminal activities described by (name) would be any more likely within the underpass than anywhere else along New Brighton Road.
However this sort of response may not effectively undermine common knowledge. Simply because the DoT 'see no reason' or 'can find no evidence' the claims of 'what we all know' are not dismissed. Indeed the attempt to query 'what we all know' reinforces the division between the DoT and the objectors. By taking issue with what is assumed to be common knowledge they isolate themselves from ordinary people. An implicit distinction is created between 'what we all know' and 'what the experts say'. What 'we all know' is closely aligned to what is 'common sense'. Thus anyone who fails to affiliate with 'what we all know' is taking up a position that is counter to common-sense. Consequently the 'sense' and credibility of their position is rendered questionable. In this way invocations of common knowledge may provide objectors with a means of subtly undermining the DoT's case. This technique may well offer objectors a more effective way of attacking the DoT than an attempt to challenge them on their own expert empirical terms.

The alternative response to claims about common knowledge is to make implicit accusations about the moral status of the objector. If the DoT were to challenge an objector's statement about what is 'common knowledge', on the grounds that the knowledge is not in fact common, it amounts to suggesting that the objector is not a common or ordinary person, but rather is some sort of outsider or crank. Access to internal DoT memoranda suggests that this is a tactic which the DoT use privately to discredit objectors, but it is unlikely that it is one they would use in public. The DoT strive to preserve the sense of a fair process, part of which involves taking objectors seriously and presenting their own position as based on objective and dispassionate consideration of 'the facts' rather than on issues of opinion or personality. Thus within a public arena such as the Inquiry they may have little defence against claims based on 'common knowledge'.

In these examples common knowledge, what ordinary people know, is explicitly posited as an alternative to expert analyses. Ordinary knowledge is elevated over expert analyses, it is suggested that it is a more relevant and reliable source of information. The impression created is that ordinary people are well aware of the likely impacts of the road and do not need the expertise of the DoT to assess their likelihood and extent - they already know. For instance in extract 9 having outlined what 'we all know' about the pollution emitted by heavy goods vehicles, the speaker states quite explicitly 'I don't think that anyone needs
any research to prove that this sort of environment cannot be beneficial to our children'. In this sense they are portrayed as 'ahead' of the experts, and expert research is deemed to be an unnecessary waste of time. Objectors can concede that experts know more than they do about the technicalities of road schemes without undermining their case. They can lay claim to expertise in another sphere; their common knowledge which they possess by virtue of being 'ordinary people' enables them to provide alternative assessments of how the road will affect the locality.

In this section I have demonstrated a range of ways in which objectors at the public inquiry sought to establish their identity as ordinary people with access to common knowledge. In contrast to previous studies which imply that the status 'ordinary person' is an objective feature of objectors which constrains and limits their performance within the public inquiry, I have demonstrated that it is an identity which objectors actively and deliberately select and utilise strategically. Far from being a negative characterisation it is a positive and valuable identity.

**Them and Us**

So far in this chapter I have shown how objectors use various claims to ordinariness to establish an alternative sphere of competence and expertise from that of the 'experts'. This section considers an additional way in which participants seek to distinguish themselves from the 'experts' and to imply that their position is in some way superior. All of these extracts are taken from interviews conducted during the Worthing-Lancing study and in each the interviewee depicts the actions or anticipated actions of 'them' - who I take to be the DoT, their consultants and contractors - wreaking harm and havoc upon 'us'. The analysis furthers the argument that divisions within planning disputes are actively worked up rather than simply pre-existing and determining interaction.

12. **WE**

They bought the houses ten years ago. They sold them back to the owners, well they sold them anyway. Now they've done the same again. and we don't know what is happening.
13. **WB**
If that does come here, they will infill here. They'll infill the other side from here to (place name), there's another big field, two fields, two big fields. They'll infill that in no time at all. Well why?

14. **WG**
You see with a week to go to the road coming through somebody in power could change their mind. And with a week to go, a month to go, whatever, they could say 'right, we've changed our mind, we're going to go the blue route, the pink route, whatever'. So we are hand tied until it actually happens.

15. **WE**
and it seemed extraordinary to me that they just come, and they just bulldoze 100 beautiful houses, maybe 200 beautiful houses.

16. **WG**
You're talking about I forget how many houses, is it 60 houses that are going to be affected? I mean that's a drop in the ocean to the Ministry of Transport.

17. **WG**
There's no question about it this is a popular golf course. But from the point of view of the Ministry of Transport, from the college over there, all the way through this golf course, through the four holes on the other course, they've got uninterrupted road building. No hold ups, no problems. They just move in and take their time leisurely.

In extract 12 the speaker is describing the effect that the years of uncertainty about the route have had on residents. The DoT had purchased a number of properties along their preferred route and had then sold them again some years later when the original plans were shelved. The plans were later resurrected and the houses repurchased. The respondent presents these events as an inexplicable cycle of buying and selling. The behaviour of the DoT is presented as irrational, leaving 'us' confused and uninformed; 'we don’t know what is happening'.

In extract 13 the respondent is expressing her fear that if the DoT's preferred route is constructed there will be subsequent pressure to develop the countryside surrounding the road. In this case 'they' are not the DoT, but planners, industrialists and businessmen, however their incursion into the countryside follows hard on the heels of 'their' (DoT's) decision to site the road across this stretch of land; 'if that does come here, they will infill'. Again 'their' actions are depicted as incomprehensible, their destructive action is built up by the repetition 'they will infill' and by the escalating description of the amount of land.
that they will infill; 'another big field, two fields, two big fields'. The extent of their damaging action is then contrasted sharply with 'our' bewilderment - 'well, why?'.

In both these extracts the construction of 'their' actions takes the form of a three part list:

1. 1. they bought the houses
2. they sold them back to the owners - well they sold them anyway
3. now they’ve done the same again

2. 1. they will infill here
2. they’ll infill the other side from here to (place name), there’s another big field, two fields, two big fields.
3. they’ll infill that in no time at all

In the second example there is a further three part list embedded within the extract. When the speaker clarifies the amount of land that will be infilled she does this in the form of a three part list:

1. another big field
2. two fields
3. two big fields

The construction of lists in three parts has been found to be a recurrent practice in ordinary conversational materials (Jefferson 1991). The phenomenon is common in a variety of forms of discourse and suggests that three partness may be a culturally available resource for list construction. Atkinson (1984) noted that three part lists were a recurrent feature of political speeches and were typically used to package praise for the speaker’s own position or criticism for that of others. He argues that three part lists provide a very suitable method for packaging praise or criticism because listing similar items can work to strengthen almost any kind of message. In this data the three part lists clearly amplify the criticism of 'their' actions, building up a picture of arbitrary destructiveness.

In extract 14 the respondent is talking about the effect that alternative routes would have on the local golf courses, and explaining that no redevelopment of the courses can be planned until it is clear which route is to be built and what the details of the route will be. Two three part constructions are employed in this extract and work to characterise 'their' behaviour as capricious:
1. with a week to go.
2. a month to go,
3. whatever,
they could say right, we've changed our mind,
1. we're going to go the blue route,
2. the pink route,
3. whatever'.

Both of these lists are constructed with a 'generalised list completer'; 'whatever', (Jefferson 1991) occupying the third slot. Jefferson argues that the use of generalised list completers such as 'whatever', 'or something', 'something like that', demonstrates that people orient to the convention of constructing lists in three parts, as they produce three part lists even when a clear third part is not immediately available. The use of generalised list completers in these data work to accentuate the impression that the DoT can do 'whatever' they want. The list is constructed in three parts but the range of options for the DoT is left open, their options on both the timescale and choice of route are characterised as unconstrained and potentially limitless. This sense that they are accountable to no-one is reinforced by the speaker's claim that they can simply say 'we've changed our mind', they do not have to provide any reasons for their decision. The particular formulation of 'our' reaction to 'their' actions in this extract, 'we are hand tied', provides a neat depiction of the power relationship between 'us' and 'them', 'we' are portrayed as physically bound, captive to their designs.

The final three extracts depict 'them' as having totally different values, and as being guided by a completely different frame of reference from 'us'. In extract 15 we see again the construction of 'their' absolute power; 'they just come, and they just bulldoze', no explanation is given for their actions, 'they just' do what to 'us' is extraordinary, destructive behaviour. They are characterised as wantonly destroying something of great value to 'us'; 'one hundred beautiful houses, maybe two hundred beautiful houses'. The speaker in extract 16 picks up this theme of the number of houses that will be taken by the DoT's scheme, and argues that the number is 'a drop in the ocean to the Ministry of Transport' providing an implicit contrast between 'their' evaluative framework and 'ours'; in 'their' assessment sixty houses have little worth.
The final extract provides a comparison of 'our' assessment of a piece of land and 'theirs' and characterises their assessment as based on entirely different factors to ours. What is to us a popular golf course is to them the site for 'uninterrupted road building'. Again we have the depiction of their casual power, 'they just move in, and take their time leisurely'.

Thus in these extracts respondents provide accounts which clearly distinguish 'them' from 'us'. 'They' are characterised as all powerful, ruthless, and capricious and 'their' behaviour is constructed as motivated by values distinct from those that 'we' hold. In contrast 'we' are portrayed as confused ('well why?', 'we don't know what is happening', 'it seemed extraordinary to me'), constrained ('we are hand tied'), and holding entirely different frameworks of value. It might be that local objectors employ contrasts of 'them ' and 'us' to the same ends as Atkinson suggests politicians do in their speeches; to gain sympathy and approval for their position. All the accounts were produced in the context of an interview with a researcher carrying out an assessment of the social impacts of the road schemes. Clearly it is in respondents' interests to gain the researcher's sympathy for their case, to convince her that they are 'hard done by' and that the DoT are proceeding unreasonably. The implicit contrast between 'them' and 'us' works to maximise their complaint that their feelings and assessments of the situation are being ignored.

The images in the data of 'their' destructiveness of the environment are contrasted implicitly with other references in the interviews to 'our' concern for the value of homes, the countryside and recreation sites. The unnamed individuals and groups who comprise 'them' are depicted as invading and desecrating what 'we' hold dear.

This rhetorical strategy is not confined to interview situations, it occurs in other contexts and in relation to other road schemes. It is used in situations where individuals seek to gain sympathy or recognition for their position and to disparage the actions and beliefs of the planners. For example a local newspaper article published before the A27 Havant-Chichester was built reports one resident as saying:

we get the impression that the road is going to be pushed through whatever we do..(village) is going to be decimated, it will no longer be the little village we have known and loved. To ruin the peace and tranquillity of this place is criminal.(The News 27/2/79)
and an article which appeared in *You* magazine (November 1991) about a proposed road scheme in Derbyshire had one resident claiming:

*(place name)* is a jewel, I see it as a haven from the modern world where we can come and breathe the fresh air and enjoy an unspoiled English landscape...this road is an abomination of desolation, cars and lorries will roar through the valley and no-one will give a second thought to what has been lost to the nation.

In both of these extracts the worth of the area is built up, in the first it is referred to as a 'little village' and a place of 'peace and tranquillity', in the second it is a 'jewel' a 'haven' and 'unspoiled'. The Department of Transport are portrayed as 'criminals', and planners of an 'abomination'. their actions will 'ruin' a village and result in something of great value being 'lost to the nation'. The following cartoon which appeared in *The Independent* (2/3/92) uses the same imagery, depicting the DoT's choice of route for the M3 over Twyford Down as the rape of the garden of Eden:

"I don't care if this is the Garden of Eden, we're coming through!"


The cartoon characterises the DoT as invading and destroying something of great beauty, with no concern for its worth or the feelings of the people who live there. The residents of the area, Adam and Eve in this picture, are depicted as powerless to stop the bulldozers
wreaking havoc on their home.

Baumann has drawn attention to these distinctions which people draw between 'us' and 'them'. He writes:

The image of the enemy is painted in colours as lurid and frightening as the colours of one's own group are soothing and pleasurable...were they allowed to have it their way, they would invade, conquer, enslave, exploit: openly if they are strong enough, or surreptitiously if forced to hide their true intentions'(1990:46)

This strategy of portraying planners as invading and destroying something which 'we' treasure has also been noted in other sociological studies. Wynne (1983, 1985) reviews the work of Winner (1978), McDermott (1974) and Daly (1970) who describe the fantasies or spectres which ordinary people create in the attempt to make meaningful their lack of control of the forces directing technology. Wynne suggests that such constructions are condensed images which become surrogates for explanations of more complex experiences. He argues that they should be seen as metaphors for the real social relationships which exist; they represent the alien social elites controlling technological innovation. Thus for Wynne, in the data above the 'monster' which will 'just bulldoze' beautiful houses, 'will infill' fields and build roads at its leisure through popular golf courses, should be viewed as a metaphor for the social relationship between planners and the public. Wynne's approach treats this portrayal of planners as alien creatures as revealing something about the 'real situation'. For instance the sentiments expressed in the data above might indicate that there is little communication between the DoT and ordinary people, or if there is that it is not understood, and that people feel powerless, confused, threatened and invaded in the face of the DoT's plans. Wynne's position here is essentially a realist one - participants' accounts are assumed to provide access to information about external states of affairs. In contrast a discourse analytic approach concentrates on the active social construction of reality through participants' accounts. The point is not to argue that objectors do not 'really' feel themselves to be powerless and exploited, but to emphasise that this sense is actively worked up by them, and that this self characterisation serves particular interactional functions.

Conclusion

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This chapter has considered strategies which participants in planning disputes over road schemes employ in order to distinguish their position from that of the planners and developers. The rhetorical devices used in all of these strategies have been documented in other sorts of data and are common methods for bolstering one’s own argument and undermining that of others.

The analysis differs from previous investigations of planning disputes which have tended to focus on the importance of factors such as differential access to resources and political influence between experts and the public, and between different groups of the public. These analyses have undermined the Government’s claims that inquiries are objective ‘fact finding’ exercises (DoT 1978) and have concluded that they are an attempt to make the planning system appear to be objective and fair. They argue that the inquiry system is biased, and that consequently the developer’s preferred scheme is likely to be built whatever the ‘factual’ case against it (see Adams 1981, Tyme 1978, Cowans 1980).

These existing studies employ an implicit assumption that divisions between the various parties in planning disputes emerge from features of the background or experience of those involved, or are caused by the institutional setting of the public inquiry. In contrast the analysis presented here focuses on the way in which divisions are worked at by participants. The distinctions between ‘ordinary people’ and ‘experts’ and between ‘us’ and ‘them’ are viewed as discursively constructed and maintained, rather than simply exerting some external constraint on interaction. One of the benefits of a close analysis of textual and interactional data such as that presented here is that it can draw attention to unexpected features of the organisation of planning disputes. The observation that objectors seek to distinguish themselves and their position from the project proponents is perhaps unsurprising, however what would not be anticipated is the way in which they use their ‘ordinariness’ as a strategy in the dispute. The powerlessness of objectors and their status as ordinary people are positively employed by participants rather than simply being disinterested descriptions of them.

Giddens defines power as ‘the means of getting things done’ (1984:281) and the ability to ‘make a difference (ibid:14). The extent to which these invocations of ordinary identity
actually make a difference within planning disputes is beyond the scope of this study. What is clear however is that participants use what has often been seen as their powerlessness - their ordinary identity - as a strategy to get things done, to try to make robust claims about social impact.

What is presented here is an alternative level of analysis, and does not contest the basic assertion that the inquiry process is fundamentally biased in favour of the proposers of new developments. What it shows however are some of the intricate interactional strategies which objectors to the proposals use to fight within the consultation and inquiry system. The planning system clearly favours developers at the expense of residents in a range of ways, however residents are not merely submissive or frustrated victims, they are active participants in the dispute. Like the experts they are concerned to distinguish 'actual' from 'fictional' accounts, and to ensure that their position appears more robust and credible than that of others. In addition this activity is not confined to the public inquiry but extends before and after it.

As noted above (p136) both Wynne’s and Hutton’s case studies of planning disputes draw attention to the way in which the issue is constructed differently by lay participants and planners, and particularly how the former construct the issue in moral terms while for the planners it is seen as simply technical. The analysis presented in Chapter 5 of the social construction of the A27 roar illustrates the existence of a similar process in the Havant-Chichester case study; local people constructed the noise as a moral problem - something which should not have been imposed upon them and which the DoT should remedy - while the DoT characterised it as a technical problem and responded to it as such (by providing barriers, insulation and compensation). These different conceptions of the problem were also evident in terms of what sort of assessment of the problem was considered necessary. The DoT relied on their technical methods of calculation while local people drew attention to their direct experience of the noise and insisted that representatives of the DoT should come down and listen to it (p91) This moral framing of the issue and appeals to direct experience as the basis for impact claims are also evident in the analysis presented in this chapter. I have shown how participants sought to depict their position as informed by different and superior values to those of the DoT, and also illustrated the extent to which
they draw upon ordinary experience of life lived locally as the basis for their claims and arguments.

The following chapter stays with the issue of how specific identities are invoked and used in the construction of social impacts. Rather than focusing on the identity of an ordinary person with common sense knowledge, it considers how local identity is claimed and utilised. In common with this chapter it explores the role that constructions of identity play in the achievement of divisions between participants, but concentrates on divisions between groups of local people rather than between experts and ordinary people.
Chapter 8

The Attribution Of Motives In Social Impact Claims

Introduction

In the previous chapter I explored how those involved in making claims about social impact prior to the construction of a road use particular representations of their own identity to bolster their own accounts and undermine those of the developers. This chapter continues with the theme of the identities participants invoke, but concentrates on how those within a locality seek to present their account as more valid than others within the same locality who take an opposing stance towards the new development. I will concentrate on how they present the motives which underlie their position and how they characterise the motives of those with different views. The data analyzed in this chapter are taken from newspapers collected and interviews conducted during the Worthing-Lancing study, and objectors’ submissions to the Havant-Chichester inquiry.

There is a tendency in some of the early work on SIA to talk of 'the public' or 'the community' as though they are an undifferentiated mass, and to assume that those living within a locality share broadly similar interests, values and views (e.g. Olsen and Merwin 1977, Watkins 1977). More recent work talks of 'publics' (Guidelines for SIA 1994) and recognises that conflicts of interest between those living close to a proposed development may be as significant as those between local people and the planners. This is particularly true with proposed road schemes which often have direct benefits for some, (for instance in terms of taking traffic away from roads near their homes) while having negative impacts for others (for instance having a road built close to their homes). In order to understand the process and nature of claims making about social impact it is necessary to pay attention to the claims made by groups holding one position about those holding a different position. Participants in such disputes engage in a variety of strategies to present their position as more credible, robust and convincing than that of others. In the previous chapter I outlined some of the ways in which those who object to proposed schemes seek to present their position as premised on entirely different knowledge and values from that of the DoT, and
to suggest that their position is superior. Similar concerns are also apparent with regard to the position of other individuals and groups within the locality. Participants recognise that the way in which they construe the costs and benefits of alternative schemes may have practical implications for the outcome of the dispute. These claims are very much part of the struggle over what counts as a social impact, often being concerned to establish that there are good reasons to support particular claims about impact and not others.

There are various ways in which participants seek to undermine the position of others. They may simply argue that the others' position is wrong - that there is no evidence to back up their claims of impact. For instance in the Worthing study there was much debate about whether the route through the town would really cut the town in two as opponents argued, and similarly whether the bypass would really ruin the Downs as opponents of that route claimed. An alternative strategy is to attempt to discredit the person or group who is providing the opposing position, by suggesting that they are not qualified to make their argument or that their motives for doing so are suspect. This is a strategy that is widely used within the public inquiry where the process follows the adversarial model of courts of law in which undermining witnesses plays a major part (see p141). In this chapter I will concentrate on this sort of strategy and focus specifically on the ways in which participants attribute motives and values in order to present their own position as credible and that of their opponents as invalid.

The chapter begins with a brief overview of literature on local opposition to siting proposals. A social constructionist critique of those studies which seek to uncover the motives of participants is developed, drawing on the work of C. Wright Mills' (1940) and Spector and Kitsuse (1987). However analyses which focus on the social and political factors which inform the development of protest are now becoming more common, and it is argued that these are potentially useful in developing a social constructionist analysis of siting disputes, as they direct attention away from the motives or values of participants and towards contextual features of the claims making process. I then demonstrate that on closer inspection some of this literature retains an interest in determining the motives of participants and as such falls short of a complete constructionist analysis. Data from the two case studies is then presented to demonstrate the potential for a constructionist approach
which avoids ascribing motives to participants and concentrates instead on how they ascribe motives to themselves and others. This analysis demonstrates that participants are aware of the negative connotations of being attributed NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) motives and that they work to avoid such characterisations for themselves, while simultaneously trying to achieve this characterisation for those holding opposing views. The analysis also illustrates the dilemma participants face of asserting their local identity and hence ownership of important knowledge, while rejecting the possible implication that they are only protesting because they are local (i.e., their protest is a NIMBY one). The conclusion of this analysis is that participants in siting disputes are engaged in an activity very similar to that of some analysts of such disputes - namely achieving the characterisation of NIMBY for some participants and avoiding it for others. The chapter contributes to a social constructionist analysis of the process of social impact by illustrating how attributions of motive and value are utilised to build up or undermine claims about social impact.

**Interests and Motives for Local Environmental Protest**

Almost all of the literature which deals explicitly with the NIMBY syndrome originates from the US, and has been published since the late 1980s. NIMBY is used to describe opponents of new developments who recognise that a facility is needed but are opposed to its siting within their locality:

> In plain language...the motivation of residents who want to protect their turf. More formally, NIMBY refers to the protectionist attitudes of and oppositional tactics adopted by community groups facing an unwelcome development in their neighbourhood...residents usually concede that these 'noxious' facilities are necessary, but not near their homes, hence the term 'not in my back yard'. (Dear 1992:288)

Most of the studies concentrate either on the siting of social facilities (e.g., prisons, homes for the mentally ill) or waste incinerators. Although the issues surrounding these sorts of facilities differ much of the analysis is similar. Concern is evident in much of this literature about the ability of local protestors to hold up the siting of Locally Unwanted Land Uses (LULU's), for instance Popper writes:

> No new free standing hazardous waste facility has been sited during the last five years. No new nuclear plant has been undertaken since 1978...No large metropolitan airport has been sited since...the early 1960s. The lack of locations for new prisons has caused such overcrowding in many existing jails that some cities...have had to release convicted criminals. (1987:9)
In order to overcome this blockage of development numerous studies have emerged which attempt to understand and overcome the NIMBY syndrome.

Freudenberg and Pastor (1992) provide a useful review of the NIMBY literature and suggest that it can be characterised as falling into three distinct perspectives. The first perspective they describe is of NIMBY as an ignorant or irrational response. In this position a clear distinction is drawn between the real risks or impacts associated with new developments, and the public's assessment of these risks. In this view the public are considered to be 'wrong' and thus the response of planners should either be to educate them, or simply to overrule them. Freudenberg and Pastor use the work of DuPont to exemplify this approach. Writing about public opposition to nuclear power he talks of 'the irrational fears of the public' (1981:14) and argues that public opposition should not sway developers because:

the fear they feel is out of proportion to the actual risks...This is phobic thinking (1981b)

This perspective utilises a deficit model of public understanding, in which the public are problematised as having too little, or incorrect knowledge. This position has been roundly criticised by sociological studies (e.g. Wynne 1989, 1991, Irwin 1995) which have demonstrated that far from being passive vessels which simply need to be filled with more or better information, members of the public are active in weighing up the usefulness and relevance of scientific information. These studies show that members of the public are able to assimilate even very complex scientific information if they can see the practical gains from doing so, and conversely may choose to ignore information if they do not trust those who are giving it or see no advantage in understanding it.

The second perspective on NIMBY which Freudenberg and Pastor identify is that it is a selfish response. Some of those who equate NIMBY with selfishness assume that this means that such protest is less important than that based on wider social and environmental concerns (e.g. Keeney and von Winterfeldt 1986); however others note that actions taken in an individual’s self interest are considered to be rational within free market systems and so can hardly be condemned. For instance Brion addresses protest based on fear of property devaluation and writes:
At stake is the value that the neighbours (of the new facility) enjoy from what most likely is not only the focus of their existence but also their principal economic asset, their residence. (1991:179)

In addition studies of siting disputes have illustrated that opponents are not alone in seeking to defend their own interest, the project proponents are likely to have interests of their own, which as Freudenberg and Pastor put it 'may mesh only imperfectly with the good of society as a whole' (op cit:43). If NIMBY response are understood as motivated by selfishness, the responses considered appropriate rely on trade-offs or compensation. For instance Inhaber (1992) proposes a method of using 'reverse auctions' where the auctioneer sets a price which communities will be paid for accepting a LULU, and then communities bid for the siting. If no bids are received the price rises until a community comes forward who are willing to accept the development. Portney (1991) outlines an alternative trade off strategy, that of risk substitution. This is based on the idea that:

people may well be willing to trade uncertainty about new risks if these new risks are substituted for risks they know or believe to be very high. (1991:138)

He provides the example of siting a hazardous waste incinerator in an area that already has a hazardous waste disposal facility, with the expressed purpose of cleaning up the site - 'the newly proposed risk would actually help to diminish existing risks’ (op cit:139). Others suggest that the provision of generous compensation to individuals in the affected area offers the best solution (e.g. O’Hare & Sanderson 1987).

It is the conceptualisation of NIMBY responses as irrational or selfish which has captured popular imagination. NIMBY is now a phrase in popular usage in the UK as well as the USA. This is well illustrated by the use of the term in newspaper articles without any explanation of what the acronym stands for. For instance:

- Is Bel Mooney, roads protestor, really a NIMBY in disguise? (Independent 8/8/94)
- NIMBY Dimbleby puts the boot into bypass (Express 23/5/94)
- Dorset is the county of NIMBYism writ large (Guardian 12/6/93)

When opposition to new developments is labelled NIMBY it is effectively dismissed as selfish, narrow and protectionist. NIMBYism is seen as illegitimate grounds for protest and
compared unfavourably to opposition based on broader social or environmental concerns.

The final perspective which Freudenberg and Pastor identify as influential is that of NIMBY response as prudent. In this view local opposition is seen as based on well grounded concern about the impacts of new developments. Freudenberg and Pastor describe the literature which puts forward this case as 'smaller newer and less consolidated' (op cit:44) than the irrationality and selfishness perspectives. They draw attention to work which suggests that the public are often acting reasonably in distrusting scientists, have good grounds for concern, and are able to see the siting problem in wider terms than the planning experts. Although Freudenberg and Pastor do not refer to it, there is a clear link here with studies of lay epidemiologies or citizen knowledges (see p191-193 for a discussion of this literature). These provide evidence of how local people's concerns about environmental risks often prove correct despite continued reassurances to the contrary from experts. This body of work can be seen to challenge directly the deficit model of public knowledge and understanding - here the public are seen as active in drawing together relevant information and evidence, which often contradicts that of the experts. Freudenberg and Pastor characterise studies which emphasise the prudence of local protestors as one perspective on NIMBYism. However given that the term NIMBYism has come to be synonymous with limited, selfish or irrational responses, it would be clearer to see this work as suggesting that in fact protestors are not NIMBYs at all, but rather have good and often wide ranging grounds for their complaints.

Having reviewed these diverse perspectives Freudenberg and Pastor suggest that in fact they all share an important characteristic; they all try to explain what lies behind local protest. While there are important differences between the perspectives (especially between those that problematise the public and those which see them as well informed and prudent) they all focus on the local participants and attempt to uncover the basis for their protest. Freudenberg and Pastor suggest that research on local development protest should move beyond this sort of explanation and instead 'focus on understanding the broader system that creates such conflicts in the first place' (op cit:39).

Motives: A Social Constructionist Approach
This interest in moving away from research concerned with the motives or bases for individuals' protest in favour of understanding the social and political factors which inform the emergence of protest can be seen to fit well with the social constructionist concern to explain the emergence and maintenance of problems. Moreover it echoes a longstanding concern within social constructionism about approaches which concentrate on individual motives, values or attitudes. This traces its roots to C. Wright Mills seminal paper 'Situated actions and vocabularies of motive' (1940). In this Mills took issue with the conventional concept of motives as explanations of social conduct, and with attempts by experts (sociologist, psychologists, psychoanalysts) to distinguish individuals' 'real' motives from the reasons that they themselves provide to explain their actions. Mills argues that this mode of analysis (which he calls motive-mongering) cannot provide satisfactory explanations for social conduct and proposes instead a radically different conception of motives. He claims that motives are not causes of actions but rather are the answers which people provide to questions such as 'why did you do that?'. Motives are attempts to justify or explain a line of conduct which has been questioned, they are resources available for use when certain kinds of questions arise. He suggests that in specific situations a range or vocabulary of appropriate motives are available. Different vocabularies are appropriate in different contexts, for different actors and at different times. Thus for him motives are considered to be a product of social situations rather than a reflection of some prior element 'within' individuals.

Spector and Kitsuse (1987) extended Mills' treatment of motives as linguistic resources to the study of values. In their study of the construction of social problems they argue that values are an important element in what they call social problems activity - the way in which a condition comes to be identified as a social problem at a particular time, how the

1 This approach has recently been criticised by Campbell (1996) who argues that Mills' claim that motives should not be considered as elements 'in' actors is 'contrary to existing usage' (p110) and incorrect. However whether or not there are actually internal states which compel people to take particular courses of action is not the issue here - these may well exist but we have no access to them. What we have are accounts in which people draw on a range of motives to explain their action. The variability of these accounts suggest that to search for the true internal motive is likely to be futile. See the later analysis (p169-171) of the variability of motives and attitudes for an illustration of this point.
problem is defined and what solutions are considered desirable. Following Mills they reject
the notion that values somehow 'cause' people to define conditions as problems, arguing
instead that values are better considered as the explanations which people give in support
of their claims, complaints or demands. They are used to justify claims, to explain not
simply what is wrong, but why it is wrong. Spector and Kitsuse argue that the imputation
of values to participants is not a valid task for the sociologist, however they note that it is
a fundamental component of participant's explanations and accounts. Thus the imputation
of values by participants making social problems claims is a crucial part of the data to be
explained rather than an adequate explanation for behaviour.

Discourse analysis also problematizes the attribution of motives, values and attitudes to
participants. The two issues that have particular relevance are the realisation that there may
be immense variability within and between accounts, and the recognition that accounts are
constructed by speakers to attend to specific interactional functions.

Mills advocates the construction of typal vocabularies of motive that are used within
specific types of situation or action, while discourse analysis recommends a close analysis
of the use of motives and values within specific accounts. A social constructionist analysis
of local disputes about new developments could be developed which combines these two
approaches. First it would draw attention to the broad social and political context in which
such protests arise, and secondly it would concentrate on what motives or values are used
by participants, how, and to what ends. Such an approach would put aside the question of
what motivates individual protestors, and would instead draw attention to the social factors
which inform the adoption and use of specific vocabularies, and would also look in detail
at particular instances of use.

There is not so far any work that explicitly applies such a social constructionist perspective
to case studies of local protests about planned new developments. However there are a
number of studies which draw attention to the wider context within which protest occurs,
and specifically to factors which result in protest which can be characterised as NIMBY
(e.g. Brion 1991, Irwin et al 1994). One such study actually uses Mills' notion of
vocabularies of motive to explain local responses - Kemp's (1990) study of local responses
to UK Nirex Ltd's proposals for the disposal of low and intermediate level radioactive waste. In the following section I will provide a brief review of this paper, and illustrate how its analysis is directly applicable to the case of road planning. I will then go on to suggest that the paper fails to take Mills' warnings about motive-mongering seriously enough and in doing so fails to provide the 'radical interpretation' (see title) of public opposition that it promises. In the remainder of the chapter I will draw on data collected during the A27 case studies to sketch out what an approach that takes seriously the recommendation to focus on participants' use of motives might look like.

### An Outline and Critique of Kemp's Approach

Kemp (1990) applies Mills' notion of vocabularies of motive to explain the values or motives invoked by those opposing the local siting of radioactive dumps. Between November 1987 and May 1988, UK Nirex Ltd distributed some 50,000 copies of a discussion document setting out their basic proposals for disposal of radioactive waste and invited comment. Copies were sent to interested parties such as local authorities, environmental pressure groups and political parties but were also sent free to members of the public on request. Almost 2,000 responses were received from members of the public and these provide the data for Kemp's analysis.

Kemp demonstrates that those who objected to Nirex's proposals drew on a range of values and concerns as the bases for their complaints. Some of these may be characterised as NIMBY. Other analysts (e.g. Lee et al 1984) had interpreted this as evidence that public opposition to the disposal of radioactive waste is motivated primarily by the NIMBY syndrome, rather than by broader environmental concerns. Kemp takes issue with this approach, and uses Mills' notion of vocabularies of motive to argue that certain situations either provide or require standard forms of response, in this case responses which might be characterised as NIMBY. He argues that 'structural, institutional and contextual factors contribute to the employment of particular forms of reasoning' (p1247), and suggests that two factors may have been particularly important in generating responses which could be characterised as NIMBY. First NIREXs' perceived past record of secretiveness, unfairness and incomprehensibility had led to a lack of legitimation for the participation process. Consequently people might have chosen not to participate, or if they did participate their
primary concern may have been to express their distrust. Without a consideration of this background, responses may be seen as irrational, confrontational and protectionist. Secondly Kemp argues that the form of the discussion document itself was likely to lead to site-specific protests. It showed a map of the areas geologically suitable for the location of repositories for radioactive waste, and so, not surprisingly, responses came mainly from the areas identified as potentially suitable. Thus what set out to be a generic exercise turned out to be site specific - a framework was created for the discussion which greatly influenced the nature of the response. Thus he argues that the production of NIMBY concerns is largely a result of various features of the context in which local people participate in such disputes.

Although Kemp is alone in explicitly using Mills' work, the suggestion that the form of the decision making process may encourage responses which can be easily characterised as NIMBY, has also been made by others working in the field. For instance Brion (1991) argues that the US decision making process has the protection of the private property of individuals as one of its prime responsibilities, and consequently favours 'selfish' claims over any wider public interest. Irwin et al (1994) also draw attention to the effect the decision making process has on forms and expressions of opposition. They argue that in public campaigns about environmental issues citizen groups are typically obliged to adopt a reactive or obstructive stance as there is not room for public involvement prior to implementation. Freuedenberg and Pastor (op cit:51) suggest that this focus on how the broader system 'creates' NIMBY responses offers the most promising way forward for research.

Looking at how aspects of the planning system lead to NIMBY responses has direct relevance for understanding public responses to proposed road schemes. As many authors have noted policy issues are deemed irrelevant and inappropriate for discussion at public inquiries (see Adams 1981, Tyme 1978, Wynne 1982). This allows the Department of Transport to continue their programme of building a road network 'by stealth' (Tyme op cit) as only local issues and the particular stretch of road being considered may be debated at each inquiry. The impacts which the Department of Transport recognises and compensates for are those which can be shown to damage personal property or quality of
life, such as increased noise or loss of land. Wider concerns for instance about the effect of a road on community life or of the road building programme on the countryside or perhaps even on the global environment are not considered relevant in the process of assessment. It is only by drawing attention to specific local and often personal impacts that objectors stand to win any victories at all.

It is clear that this level of social constructionism - exploring how aspects of the decision making process affect the sort of claims made - provides useful insights for studies of local responses to environmental change. However I suggest that this is only one part of a social constructionist response, and that studies which stop at this level do not provide the corrective to studies focusing on attitudes and motives which they promise. This is well illustrated by Kemp's study.

Alongside his assertion that the decision making process influences the sort of claims people make about the impacts of new development, Kemp also develops a rather different argument. In his analysis of letters to NIREX he notes that people often use what could be characterised as NIMBY objections to the plans alongside objections which draw on wider social and environmental concerns. He takes this to indicate that:

the NIMBY concept may be applied too readily, a convenient attribution of motive which disguises a more fundamental range of technical, environmental and socio-economic concerns. The NIMBY concept should therefore be rejected as distorting and unhelpful. (ibid:1239)

In this his argument mirrors exactly the position of authors who argue that NIMBY concerns are often veiled by more socially acceptable reasons for protest (e.g. Keeney and Von Winterfeldt 1986). Kemp simply turns the argument on its head and claims that what looks initially to be a NIMBY response, on closer inspection turns out to be one based on more acceptable concerns. In this he slides back into the motive mongering which Mills warns against. He is attempting to 'plumb behind verbalisation' (Mills op cit:910) and pronounce on the 'real' motives of complainants. A true social constructionist approach must leave this concern behind and concentrate on how participants use and attribute motives and values in the course of the dispute.

Kemp takes a case study of a protest which has been characterised as NIMBY and attempts
to demonstrate that it is not in fact NIMBY at all. This concern to distinguish between NIMBY responses and more legitimate protest is also apparent in a number of other studies. Welsh (1993:15) also uses the example of opposition to nuclear developments in Britain and suggests that the labelling of such protests as NIMBY 'gained widespread credibility in the 1980s'. He explores how nuclear protest has come to be characterised as NIMBY and then uses case studies to demonstrate that protests could be characterised quite differently, and in more positive terms. Although both Welsh and Kemp argue for a more considered use of the term NIMBY both their studies implicitly engage in a process of attempting to distinguish NIMBY responses from non-NIMBY responses. Bullard (1993) does this even more explicitly. In his discussion of the environmental justice movement in the USA (a largely black grassroots movement which has emerged to fight 'environmental racism' particularly in relation to the siting of Locally Unwanted Land Uses - LULUs) he blames the NIMBY actions of some white communities for the environmental problems suffered by black communities. He argues that these white communities oppose developments in their locality and as a consequence siting shifts to poorer less powerful black communities. What is interesting though is that he labels the opposition of white communities as NIMBY (i.e. illegitimate and selfish) while he sees the opposition of black communities to the same proposals as an exciting and positive development. While there may well be differences in the ways in which the problems are conceptualised and responded to between the two sorts of communities, to label one NIMBY and the other as not NIMBY is essentially a value judgement. It serves to legitimate one protest and undermine another.

In their influential book on environmental groups Lowe and Goyder (1983) do a similar thing. They outline the various ways in which middle class residents seek to protect their own interests under the guise of environmental concern, for instance by attempting to have desirable residential areas classified as preservation areas, and so protected from developments such as the provision of low cost housing. Although they do not use the term this characterisation suggest that those involved are basically NIMBYs - they protest about proposed developments because they do not want them in their backyard. They characterise such campaigns as furthering the interests of one sector of the local community often at the direct expense of other sectors, and suggest that such group activity is motivated by self interest rather than true environmental concern. To a varying extent all of these authors
make moral judgments about the validity of protests.

Of course individual authors are entitled to their own judgements on the validity of specific protests. However the point is that such concerns should play no part in a social constructionist analysis of such protests. As Spector and Kitsuse point out, deciding whether complaints about a 'problem' are justified is to leave behind the analytical project of social constructionism and to become engaged in the practical project of participants in the dispute.

Moreover discourse analytic studies have demonstrated the difficulty of deciding conclusively what the 'real' motives or attitudes of people are. This can be illustrated by extracts from an interview conducted with a couple who lived, and ran a school, close to one of the proposed routes for the A27 Worthing-Lancing. At times during the course of the interview the respondents said things which might be taken to indicate NIMBYism, while at other points they raised a variety of social and environmental arguments against the route they opposed. For example the following extract suggest that they are classic NIMBYs, concerned primarily with defending their own interests:

1. WB (I - Interviewer)
I O.K. Anything else that you can think of?
WBi Well if it affects our living in the end we don't think much of it.
WBii Well no, I suppose that's really what it boils down to actually.
WBi the bottom line
WBii actually yes, you've sort of got to look after your own interests to some extent.

However, at other points in the interview both pointed to a range of other social and environmental concerns which informed their opposition to the plans. For instance they expressed concern about the Department of Transport's road building programme, arguing that the building of new roads and the subsequent development which roads attract will erode valued countryside. For example the man argued:

2. WBii
Just because we happen to live in this area we shouldn't say 'oh no, well nobody else could come here, you know, and sort of enjoy it'. But the point I think is, that what we feel is that it has been open country always, and once it's changed it's changed for ever. Gone. More town. And very soon there won't be any sort of open space along the South Coast at all, you know, it'll all be bricked over.
His wife similarly builds a case for opposing the route close to their home which seems to be based on a range of environmental and social concerns, rather than narrow self interest:

3. **WB1**

If they put the road here, so close, they will infill in no time at all these few fields between *(superstore)* and the church. And the church has stood there, it’s Saxon, it’s a beautiful church, it really is lovely. They’ll infill that in no time at all, you’d see it just...you know. And you need space, just the quality of life. We have a lot of people, cos our land has a public footpath going through the far woods, and ever so many people I know use it to go up onto the Downs, they walk their dogs. Now that will end if that ghastly bypass goes over there. You need greenery, you need to be able to look up.

4. **WB1**

I take the dog for long walks over the Downs regularly, and I do see a lot of people you know. I’ve got children your age sort of thing, and our children mock me cos I always say, when they were younger, ’you should always say ’good day’”. So we always say ’good day’ to people we meet, and we chat...but you would, that would go. That is part of how life should be, that you should be able to walk the downs and, well just to breathe the air and hear the birds and just to hear the breeze.

In these extracts the respondent points to valued features of the locality which she argues would be disrupted or destroyed if the proposed route went ahead. She appeals to a variety of environmental and social justifications for her claims, drawing attention to the importance of aesthetic considerations (’it’s a beautiful church, it really is lovely’), heritage value (’the church has stood there, it’s Saxon’), rights to common land and the country (’you should be able to walk the downs’) the need for space and perceptual stimulation (’you need space’, ’you need greenery’, ’you need to be able to look up’), the importance of the area for social contact (’we always say good day to people we meet, and we chat’) and for recreation (’ever so many people I know use it’).

It is difficult to know on what grounds we can decide what the respondents’ ’real’ motives for opposing the route are - are they really motivated by this wide range of social and environmental concerns and simply mention self interest as they realise that this is the only justification likely to be taken seriously in the decision making process, or are they really only concerned about their own interest but mention these wider justifications in order to build a more sympathetic case? Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) and Potter and Wetherell (1987), recognise that it will always be possible for the researcher to extract a version of
what the respondent 'really means'. This could be done in a variety of ways: by eliminating certain statements as hyperbole, irony, rhetoric or whatever; by interpreting the data in accordance with tacit understandings gleaned in the course of interaction with participants; or by introducing a range of modifying variables (the idea that the expression of an attitude will always be modified by other variables, such as judgement of what other people will think etc. (Potter and Wetherell op cit:54)). However they stress that:

this process of reinterpretation to distil a comprehensive ultimate version can produce firm conclusions only by disregarding copious interpretive uncertainties (Gilbert and Mulkay op cit:11)

The fact that in practice people say so many contrasting, apparently inconsistent things suggests that the search for an underlying consistent motive may be misplaced. The response advocated by discourse analysts is to put the question of what really motivates participants aside, and concentrate instead how participants use NIMBY and environmental motives in their accounts and for what purposes. In the following section I will provide an analysis of how NIMBY motives were used by participants in the disputes about the A27 Havant/Chichester and Worthing/Lancing, which indicates clearly how the concerns of analysts of NIMBYism often converge with the interests of those actually involved.

**Participants' Use of NIMBY Motives**

**Self Awareness**

The first thing to note is that participants in disputes about new developments are well aware of the negative connotations of the attribution of NIMBYism. Their accounts display an element of reflexivity about motives; *at times they display their knowledge about how their position could be construed.* This is apparent in extract 2 in which the speaker acknowledges that protecting the area in which one lives may be considered selfish and states that complaints based on this motivation 'shouldn’t’ be made. Similarly a report in the *Mail on Sunday*'s *You* magazine (November 1990) about a proposed road through a village called Bagnor on the edge of the Berkshire Downs, cites one local objector thus:
We all hate the thought of the road, and, of course, I suppose I could be called a NIMBY because I certainly don’t want that bloody thing in my back yard. But it is much more than my personal misfortune; the real issue is the damage it will do to the...community...the ministry says that it has completed something called an environmental impact assessment but what do they mean by that? Do they take into account the loss of Bagnor to the entire community?

Here we see that the speaker acknowledges that 'I suppose I could be called a NIMBY'. In both these examples the display of self awareness about how their complaint could be framed is followed directly by an attempt to establish that this would be an incorrect depiction of their position. In extract two the speaker goes on to outline the broad base for his complaint; his concern that the countryside is being eroded by the construction of new roads and consequent development around them. He constructs his concern as being about the whole South Coast rather then simply about the area in which he lives, or the particular road being proposed. In extract 5 the speaker asserts that her complaint is motivated by 'more than my personal misfortune' being based on her concern to protect the whole community.

Participants in disputes about road schemes work with the same assumptions as academic and media analysts of those disputes. They assume that NIMBY responses are inadequate bases for complaint, while social and environmental concerns are legitimate and laudable. They engage in the same activity that I have argued writers on NIMBYism are caught up in, that is ascribing NIMBY motivations to some while attempting to establish that it is an inappropriate characterisation of the complaints of others. The following analysis of their accounts illustrates that participants in such disputes attempt to characterise the positions of those with opposing views as informed by NIMBYism, while at the same time characterising their own position as explicitly not NIMBY, and informed by wider social and environmental concerns.

**Attributing Self-Interest to Others and more Laudable Motives to Self**

Analysis of a variety of different sorts of accounts has illustrated the attention which speakers pay to presenting their version as objective, unbiased and considered in contrast to the ill-informed, biased or misguided views of others (see Gilbert and Mulkay 1984, Edwards and Potter 1992). For example in their interviews with scientists Gilbert and
Mulkay identified a phenomenon which they called accounting for error. They called any account in which the speaker identifies the views of one or more scientists as mistaken, and provides some kind of account which enables us to understand why these scientists adopted an incorrect theory, an example of 'accounting for error'. In these accounts speakers linked their own position firmly to empirical facts such as experimental results, while the position of those they identified as being in error were explained in highly contingent terms; for example as the result of stubbornness, stupidity, bias or prejudice. Gilbert and Mulkay write that these accounts have an asymmetrical structure: speakers employ an empiricist repertoire to account for their own position, and a contingent one to account for the positions of others. In the empiricist repertoire scientists characterise their actions and beliefs as following unproblematically from the empirical facts, while in the contingent repertoire actions and beliefs are accounted for in terms of factors such as personal characteristics, social ties or group membership.

In the Worthing case study data a similar pattern was apparent. Speakers attributed the 'wrong' positions of others to the result of 'putting their head in the sand', 'not listening to facts', 'not understanding' and personal interest, while their own position was characterised as 'facing up to facts', objective, based on common sense and 'rational appraisals' of expert advice and information. This is well illustrated by an interview conducted with three men who were founder members of an action group formed in opposition to Downland routes. All of the interviewees lived in a village which would be very close to the proposed route across the Downs and could expect to be adversely affected by it. WCi describes the rationale of the action group thus:

6. WCi
As far as (action group) is concerned as WCiii says it's a number of people who are concerned, who've got together, and thought we must put the other side of the case, we must make sure it's presented, and not from the point of view of (village) but from the point of view of just ordinary common sense logic and economics

He argues that their opposition to the Downland route is not based on personal and local interests but rather is informed by common sense and a wider consideration of the issues. On the other hand he claims that the downland route he opposes:

7. WCi
just does not make sense, it doesn't make economic sense, it doesn't make environmental sense, it doesn't make engineering sense, it is a completely spurious
argument

His argument that his group’s position is motivated by common sense and information in contrast to the ‘spurious arguments’ of their opponents, is also taken up by WCii. He describes his attendance at a public exhibition of the DoT’s consultants’ plans thus:

8. WCii

I went in there, and I went round and I looked at all the things and as I said I tried to be a rational person and just assimilate information, come up with an answer. And you’d have to’ve been totally biased before you went in, and blinkered, not to come up with what Howard Humphreys came up with in the end.

In this extract he builds a clear picture of himself and the route he supports as entirely logical and reasonable. We are told that he ‘looked at all the things’ and ‘tried to be a rational person, just assimilate information, come up with an answer’ His decision to support the recommended route is presented as an entirely open minded consideration of the ‘facts’. He goes on to claim that anyone who saw the exhibition and did not reach the same conclusion would have to have been ‘totally biased’ and ‘blinkered’. Clearly ordinary people rely on empiricist repertoires to bolster their case, and contingent repertoires to undermine the position of others, just as much as scientists do.

In addition speakers not only attempt to render their position credible and ‘right’ by asserting its objective and unbiased nature, but also by stressing that it is informed by environmental values. Participants claimed not only that the route they opposed would have adverse effects on the environment, but also where they were actively supporting the construction of another route, they often claimed that this would actually have beneficial effects on the environment. For examples in pamphlets produced by groups opposing the on-line route in favour of a bypass, it was claimed that the route they opposed would ‘have an unacceptable impact on the environment’, whereas a Downland bypass would ‘enable others to share with us the splendour of the views which the Downs provide’. Those who held the opposite view (opposing a downland bypass in favour of the on-line alternative) used exactly the same strategy. One interviewee claimed that a bypass would ‘ruin the Downland environment’ while the on-line route would improve the environment in the residential area by lessening the pollution caused by present traffic congestion.

Participants also question their opponents’ motivation for protest, characterising their
proposals as both damaging to the environment and motivated by self-centred NIMBY concerns. The first example of this is also taken from the interview with the resident’s association discussed above. The association favoured the on-line route proposed by the DoT, but failing that preferred the prospect of a bypass south of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) rather than one further north. In this extract the speaker suggests that the local MP is only opposed to the building of a southern bypass because that route would affect land belonging to the golf club of which he is president. His position is effectively undermined by the suggestion that it is based on selfish concerns.

9. WCiii
He (local MP) said and I quote...’a bypass route...I think that would have serious disadvantages’. Now you know why don’t you? It goes through (his) golf club. He’s president of the golf club, so it mustn’t go through there.

This contrasts with the position of the association outlined in extract 6 where WCiii asserts that their position is ‘not from the view of (village)’ but based on more objective and reasonable grounds. Thus a clear contrast is presented in the interview between the selfish basis of the complaints of others, and the impartial basis of the group’s own complaints. Research in a variety of different settings (e.g. Smith (1978) in an account of a young woman’s psychiatric problems, Atkinson (1984) in political speeches) has illustrated the way in which contrasts are often employed in this way in accounts to bolster a particular version of events or behaviour and undermine others.

The second example is taken from an interview conducted during the Havant/Chichester study in which the leader of a residents’ association was reflecting about the public inquiry held before the road was built. In this the speaker also constructed a clear contrast between his own objective views and the narrow self interested complaints of others.

10. HQ
Well, there was a deal of controversy about it (the Public Inquiry) because the various factions representing the route alternatives were all quite articulate, and I think made their cases very well. The Inspector had a tough job really arbitrating between the various objections, because they were six of one and half a dozen of the other, and I think it would be fair to say that the underlying objective of the people that spoke was to keep the thing away from their personal patch. Understandably, but it’s the old story. We had the advantage in that most of the people who represented the Association... were not directly affected by the road, and therefore could remain reasonably objective about the route alternatives.

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He credits other objectors at the public inquiry with having given the inspector a 'tough job' as they were all 'quite articulate', however their arguments are undermined by the suggestion that these people were motivated simply to 'keep the thing away from their personal patch'. The speaker sets up the majority of other objectors at the inquiry as being motivated by self interest and then contrasts them with the position of the association he belongs to which could be 'reasonably objective' because its members were not directly affected by the road.

In both interviews the speakers appear to recognise that their own position may be as susceptible to charges that it is based on narrow self interest as those which they criticise. They acknowledge this possibility and work to avert this categorisation. In the first interview the speaker states clearly that their position is not 'from the point of view of (village)' and in the second the speaker claims that their position could not be denigrated as self interested as none of the members of the association expected to be directly affected by the road.

Attempts to undermine the position of other by suggesting that they are motivated by self interest was also apparent in letters published in the local press. During the course of the public inquiry into the construction of the A27 Worthing/Lancing road the local newspapers (Worthing Herald and West Sussex Gazette) regularly carried letters from local people making arguments for and against the routes being discussed. Many of these letters aimed to demonstrate the fallibility of arguments put forward in support of routes to which the writer was opposed. One of the strategies used to achieve this was the suggestion that proponents of the route were motivated by self interest. This is particularly well illustrated by the following exchange of letters:
11. (Herald 29/10/93)
Although to anyone with a scrap of intelligence it is clear that the Downlands route is the most damaging and shortsighted of the options on offer (none of them attractive), the dominant voices of our council have consistently supported it and have spent many thousands of pounds of our money in arguing the case. It beggars credibility that any of these people could actually believe that it is better to betray an ancient trust and destroy downland than to sacrifice a few houses and the corner of a golf course. So why do they do it? Surely, they could not be motivated by self interest? Could their judgement be swayed by the fact that they live in fine houses close to the DoT route, and would stoop to any level, nimby-fashion, to deflect the inconvenience of the road works to someone else’s doorstep? Perish the thought. Perhaps you could set our minds at rest on this point by reprinting the list of councillors and their views alongside their addresses. The local residents will be able to draw their own conclusions from whatever correlation emerges.

12. (Herald 19/11/93)
Your correspondent suggests that councillors opposed to the DoT route could be motivated by self-interest, and would like to see their views accompanied by their addresses. Could we perhaps start with the councillor who has been leading the opposition to the council’s view that the Cissbury Ring route will serve Worthing residents best. The leading exponent of the DoT preferred route is (name) whose home is just a few hundred yards from where the Findon Gap route would cross the A24.

This example illustrates how people holding different positions use exactly the same mode of argument in an attempt to undermine each other. In the first instance the writer suggests that those who oppose the DoT’s preferred route through the town only do so because the route would be near their homes, while in the second the writer claims that the position of one of the main opponents to the bypass route is informed by the close proximity of her home to that route.

Thus it seems clear that one of the strategies used by participants in disputes about social impact is to attempt to tarnish those who hold opposing views with the suggestion that they are NIMBYS, while at the same time working to avoid the characterisation of themselves as NIMBY.

Local Knowledge and Self Interest: A Dilemma
However ascribing NIMBYism to those within the locality who hold opposing positions is not without its problems. By tying the ascription of NIMBYism to place of residence as is done in extracts 11 and 12, participants could be seen to undermine one of their own most
important resources - the claim to local knowledge and experience. In Chapter 7 I outlined how knowledge gained from living locally is invoked as a powerful resource against the opinions and assessments of experts, and how living close to the proposed development is taken to provide a warrant for complaint and access to specialist knowledge about likely impacts (see also discussion of the importance of direct experience p91-92). This sort of claim would seem to sit uncomfortably alongside claims that others' local residence provides evidence of the selfish and limited nature of their complaints. However the arguments do coexist, for instance later in the letter that extract 11 is taken from, the writer goes on to argue:

13. At least we can't accuse our revered MP of pursuing self-interest, as he doesn't even live in his constituency

So the letter begins by undermining the position of some people because they live close to the route they oppose ('could their judgement be swayed by the fact that they live in fine houses close to the DoT route?'), and ends by undermining the position of someone else because he does not live close to any of the proposed routes ('he doesn't even live in his constituency'). Here not living locally is taken to indicate that the MP does not have the right, or the relevant knowledge to participate in the debate. Thus it seems that not being local at all disqualifies people from making valid contributions to the debate just as much as being 'too' local does.

There are numerous other examples in the press of the way in which not living locally is considered to disqualify people from making pronouncements on the plans. For example:

14. (Herald 3/12/93) We folk in Durrington...are a small band of people who love living here, who feel at home here, who feel lucky to live in an area, which although not totally quiet feels like a village...How dare anyone not living in our heart threaten to destroy us?

15. (Herald 27/5/94) Mr X of West Buildings said he resented the fact that a Worthing MP who lived 60 miles away and a few councillors most of them having moved into Worthing in recent years 'should have the power to destroy our heritage for their own advantage and their golf courses'.
Complaints that the future of Worthing were being settled by people who did not live near it were made by Mrs X of Cradock Place, Durrington. She said she was deeply disturbed that people planning and organising Worthing were not going to live there. They did not even know the town.

A mania for road building was alleged against the DoT... a change of political will was needed and it must be directed to the DoT mandarins who did not live here and had no bond with the area.

The dilemma of how to achieve credible local knowledge for oneself while discrediting others as motivated by NIMBYism seems to rest on subtle cues. Those arguing that people who do not live in the area have no right to comment, build their argument in terms of the sense of community (we folk in Durrington...feel at home here), shared heritage (‘our heritage’), local knowledge (‘knowing the town’) and having a ‘bond’ with the area. Although all of these motivations draw attention to the local identity of residents, no mention is made of self interest. Living locally is characterised as providing participants with insights into what the social and environmental impacts of the development are likely to be. This is clearly illustrated in objectors’ submissions to the first Havant-Chichester Inquiry in which they often drew attention to details of everyday life in the locality which would be disrupted by the proposed road. For instance one objector claimed that the proposed route for the road would have a divisive effect upon the local community:

The map that was being used by the Department...to show the route through (town) grossly misrepresented the real and substantial links between the two halves of the community. Large areas shown as blank on the map because they contained few buildings and no roads are rich with associations upon which the health of the community depends - the recreation grounds where children swing, play with balls, where dogs are taken for walks, where the town’s cricket and football teams play, where the tennis courts are located, where senior citizens sit and scold the youngsters who cycle along the footpaths, where the community’s annual flower show takes place. I could point to the farm where many of us go for manure in the spring, to the paddock next to the roman Catholic Church where the children going to and from school feed the horses.

The speaker goes on to detail more ‘associations’ which he argues that the proposed route will destroy. His argument rests on the importance of direct personal experience within a locality. He builds up a detailed picture of social activity within the area, suggesting that the meaning of the place cannot be understood by reference to maps and plans of the area,
but requires experience. An objector representing another community along the route of the prosed road argued similarly:

19. 136a
The friendly, lively spirit of the village depends on the ease with which people can move about the village, to the shops, Post Office, school, church; the daily journeys with their informal, meetings and greetings, visits to friends and relations. Meetings and social events centre largely on the church hall, which is also the polling station. Daily walkers, perhaps with a dog, make use of the quieter lanes such as Clay Lane, or the footpaths which lead towards the harbour. Younger children love to feed the ducks at the mill pond.

Here a vivid and idyllic picture of village life is built up on the basis of the objector’s ordinary knowledge gained as a resident in the locality. In both these examples attention is drawn to details which would not be apparent if you did not have extended personal experience of living within the area. This strategy ties in with the other ways outlined in the previous chapter by which people claim special and sometimes superior insight into the likely effects of the development by virtue of their identity as ordinary, local people. In drawing attention to local experience and knowledge no mention is made of the participants’ personal situations; it is wider effects on the community and natural environment that are emphasised.

Concerns about the effect of a new development on private property are those most easily labelled NIMBY. In the Worthing case study those opposing the on-line route which would require the demolition of approximately 100 homes are those most susceptible to being labelled NIMBY. This strategy was often used by those who argued that an on-line route would be preferable to a downland route. There are numerous instances in the data where although NIMBYism is not directly mentioned a contrast is made between the value of houses and the value of the Downs with the Downs being constructed as much more valuable. For instance:

20. Herald 22/10/93 (letters)
The quality of life is more important than a number of houses that can be rebuilt elsewhere. The Downs cannot be rebuilt once they are destroyed they are lost forever.

21. Herald 19/11/93 (letters)
You can build more houses - you cannot create more downland.
Asserting that Downs are more valuable than houses is to assert implicitly that those who seek to protect the Downs have more valid and laudable motives than those who seek to protect houses.

However an examination of the claims made by the other side (those opposed to the on-line route) reveals that their complaints were framed to suggest that their concerns had a social or environmental basis rather than being simply to do with houses and individual interests as their opponents suggested. When they did talk about the planned demolition of houses they were more likely to talk about them as homes than simply as houses - drawing attention to the social meaning rather than the bricks and mortar. For instance one objector at the inquiry was quoted in the press as saying:

22. Herald 20/5/94
The most important agent of human conservation (is) the home. It is here that the future of each individual is moulded, and it is the homes of many Worthing people that are to be destroyed or seriously affected by the published scheme.

These participants also raised social and environmental concerns, for instance about social severance ('Don’t split our community’ letter Herald 3/12/93), the effects of pollution on health (objector at the inquiry talked of his fears of 'dramatic increases in respiratory illnesses’ Herald 17/12/93), the environmental problems of noise and vibration (WSG 23/6/94) and the effects of the on-line route on the countryside bordering the town (objector claimed 'that rural fringe..was for the people of Worthing as precious as countryside anywhere in the Downs, because it was the most used and accessible’ Herald 21/1/94). Participants also constructed their opposition as environmental in a general sense by making reference to the variety of ways in which the residential environment would be affected:

23. WSG 23/6 94 Objector at the inquiry cited as saying:
the DoT route through built up Worthing would have a grievous impact upon the pleasant, mature residential environment of the northern part of Worthing.

24. Herald 18/2/94 Objector at the inquiry cited as saying:
the effect of the green route on the urban environment would be serious.

Thus for residents within the area, the construction of one’s own position as valid and that of others within the locality as invalid appears to rest on the delicate strategy of tying one’s own concern about the locality to issues of local community and environment, while simultaneously tying other’s concerns about locality to issues of private property and self
interest. One’s own position is widened while that of others is narrowed.

This analysis is supported by Walsh et al’s (1993) study of opposition to the siting of waste incinerators. They attempted to explain why a protest in one area successfully quashed the planning application, while in another area protests failed. They attribute this partly to the way in which claims about impact were framed and note that the unsuccessful activists:

acknowledged in retrospect that they probably should have concentrated their early efforts on ridding themselves of the NIMBY tag by emphasising the importance of serious recycling and the proposed incinerator’s negative consequences for those living further from the site. (1993:36)

Hieman (1990) makes a similar observation. He too concentrates on incinerator siting, and argues that the responses of local people are increasingly that the development should Not be In Anyone’s Back Yard (NIABY), rather then being NIMBY. While in making this claim he could be categorised with those I earlier depicted as making value judgements about the worth of protests, he makes the observation that:

Community opponents when adopting this position (NIABY), have greatly strengthened their solidarity and ability to thwart siting proposals. (1990:360)

In other words participants recognise that in order to be successful they need to present their complaints as motivated by environmental and social considerations.

Conclusions

This chapter has tackled an issue which preoccupies many of those writing on local environmental protest, that of the protestors’ motivations and values. In contrast to most work in this area I have made a case for putting aside attempts to distinguish those who can be characterised as NIMBYs from those with wider social and environmental concerns. Taking a social constructionist viewpoint I have argued that the attribution of motives and values is the business of participants in disputes about new developments, and not of the sociologist who seeks to understand them. I suggest that a social constructionist analysis might operate at two levels; first drawing attention to the way in which features of the social and political context inform the kinds of claims that participants are likely to make, and secondly examining actual instances of claims making in some detail.
The analysis illustrates how participants use attributions of NIMBY to undermine the positions of others and seek to characterise themselves as motivated by wider social and environmental concerns. I suggest that there is a parallel between the aims of those caught up in such disputes about developments and the aims of some of those who analyze them - they are at pains to achieve the categorisation of NIMBY for some participants and not for others. This observation strengthens the case for providing constructionist analyses which seek to avoid taking sides in disputes about problems, and instead explore the activity of claims making.

Freudenberg and Pastor (1991) stress the need for case studies such as this which deal explicitly with the ways in which participants in disputes 'emphasize the framings that will encourage the outcomes they consider desirable' (p54). I have shown the degree of awareness there is amongst participants about the consequences of being labelled NIMBY, and indicated some of the subtle ways in which they try to avoid having that label attached to them. This provides an important part of an analysis of the construction of social impacts. Participants recognise that if their fears or complaints about impacts are labelled as NIMBY, then their claims that a problem exist or is serious are likely to be dismissed. Thus motives can be seen as a very important resource for participants in the business of the social construction of social impacts.
Chapter 9

Conclusion

The main argument of this thesis has been that the social impacts of new developments are socially constructed. In order to make this argument clearly a variety of literature was reviewed including that on social impact assessment, social constructionism, the sociology of the environment, and the planning process. Data from two case studies of disputes over the siting of road schemes were used to illustrate some of the resources which participants drew upon in their construction of social impacts. In this concluding chapter I will draw out the insights gained from the preceding analysis and indicate the contribution it makes to existing literature. However it is important first to acknowledge the limitations of the research, and to reflect upon problematic aspects of the analysis.

The Case Studies

There are various aspects of the case studies which might be considered problematic. First there is the question of how representative the two case studies are of siting disputes. Obviously disputes over the siting of roads may vary in significant ways from those over the siting of other new developments - waste incinerators or nuclear facilities for instance. Although a comparison of the process of the construction of social impacts in case studies of a variety of sorts of development was beyond the scope of the thesis, preliminary observations suggest that similar strategies are used in other sorts of siting disputes (for instance Jordan (1994) notes how distinctions between expert and ordinary people are drawn upon in disputes over the siting of waste incinerators, and Walsh et al (1993) note the importance that protestors against waste incinerators attach to depicting themselves as not NIMBY). This suggests that exploring to what extent the analysis is representative of a general process of the construction of social impacts would be an interesting and important area for further research.

The second issue is the extent to which the case studies are representative of disputes over the siting of new roads. In the 1990s protest about new roads has been characterised by
campaigns of direct action (see p68). The cases studied here differ from these protests in a number of significant ways. In neither of the case studies were debates about the environmental implications of transport policy or the desirability of building more roads prominent. Protest was largely confined to participation within the public inquiry and the writing of letters and petitions, in contrast to the more dramatic tactics which characterise today's road protests. In addition in both cases the disputes remained local and did not attract wider media interest or public support. However as the focus of the research was not opposition to the planning of roads per se, these differences do not present a major problem. The more extensive and dramatic protests which have occurred recently could be analyzed in similar ways to the ones used as case studies here. Issues about how the impacts of the developments are constructed, and how protestors seek to characterise their own identity in order to make their claims robust are equally relevant in these cases. Researchers to explore to what extent the strategies used in the 'conventional' disputes studied here relate to those used in direct action campaigns suggests another promising area for future research.

Additional concerns relate to the specific choice of case studies, and to the amount of, and sort of data collected in each. In much research the choice of case studies is governed by pragmatic and practical factors as much as by theoretical considerations of suitability. In this case the research began after Acer Consultants Ltd. had commissioned me to research the social impacts of the A27 Worthing/Lancing, and so the choice of that case study was made for me. The choice of the A27 Havant/Chichester was made after discussions with contacts within the DoT. The main considerations were that the site needed to be in the South East of England for easy access, and should be an area where there had been some local opposition to the scheme during the planning process, and where there was some ongoing debate. The A27 Havant/Chichester was the only scheme which fitted this description. With regard to the data collected in the Worthing/Lancing study I noted in Chapter 4 that it would have been desirable to have access to a wider sample of interviewees. It would also have been interesting to carry out further interviews during the public inquiry process, however my direct involvement in this process as a representative of the DoT's consultants made this impossible. The Havant/Chichester case study could also have been extended to update the progress of the campaign about the A27 roar (data
were collected up to July 1993). Overall the research aims to illustrate in detail aspects of the social construction of social impacts. Although more data would potentially provide additional insights into aspects of this process, and might make the arguments presented more convincing, the data collected were sufficient to provide an important start at understanding this process.

**Relevant Literature**

In order to provide necessary background to the research a variety of literature was drawn upon. Rather than having one discrete literature review chapter, many of the chapters provide some discussion of existing research. I began by reviewing some of the literature on social impact assessment, in order to provide some context for my interest in social impacts and to illustrate the way in which the concept of social impact is theoretically underdeveloped. I then argued that social impacts could be regarded as socially constructed, and so reviewed some of the main debates about social constructionism in order to introduce the approach clearly. Although social impact assessment has developed as a distinct field of research it can be conceptualised as part of a sociology of the environment. In Chapter 3 I provided an introduction to this developing area within sociology drawing particular attention to debates about the value of constructionist analyses of environmental issues and problems. Chapter 4 also contains an element of literature review - existing research on the public inquiry process was drawn upon in order to provide some background to the disputes explored in the case studies. It was necessary to consider all of these areas in order to build up an understandable and convincing account of the social construction of social impacts. However a problem of drawing on so many different areas is the possibility that none will be reviewed in sufficient detail. Hopefully enough detail has been provided here to introduce the relevant insights from each of these areas.

In addition to the major areas of literature reviewed, in the course of writing a thesis it become apparent that there are many other areas of research which it could be relevant to consider. Those that it might have been particularly useful to consider include the vast literature on risk, and particularly that relating to lay perceptions and constructions; and the emerging literature on how to resolve planning disputes through processes of consensus building. The discussion of discourse analysis presented in Chapter 6 might also have been
strengthened by a consideration of other forms of discourse analysis. However within the constraints of preparing a thesis it is not possible to consider all potentially interesting areas of research. The literature which has been reviewed provides sufficient background for the arguments which have been developed.

Social Constructionism and Discourse Analysis
The limitations of the thesis which have been considered so far relate to its scope and comprehensiveness. Perhaps more difficult to resolve are concerns about the sort of analysis which has been argued for and pursued. In Chapter 2 an introduction was provided to social constructionism which drew attention to the ontological gerrymandering (or the greasy pole) which characterises constructivist analyses. In the course of building a constructivist account of social impacts the difficulty of adhering to a consistent stance has been particularly apparent. Choices have had to be made throughout about what is to be treated as a social construction, and what this should mean. For instance in places participants are referred to as local people as though this is a straightforward description, while elsewhere the analysis aims specifically to show that such an identity is actively constructed. This is a situation which those writing about social constructionism (e.g. Woolgar and Pawluch 1995a) recognise as pervading all such accounts. However even if this is acknowledged as inevitable and not characterised as a problem (e.g. Collins and Yearley 1992a), it is likely to come to seem problematic in the course of developing an analysis. Perhaps the conclusion is just that a greasy pole is not a very comfortable place to be, and there are times when balancing becomes very difficult!

Adhering to a social constructionist position also means attempting to remain agnostic about the reality of the social impacts about which claims are being made. While recognising the insights that such a stance offers, it is very hard to maintain. This is partly because it is impossible to avoid having preconceptions and opinions about the situation which you are studying, and keeping these out of the sociological analysis is difficult and sometimes frustrating. Like the participants in disputes about social impacts the analyst too has common-sense ideas about what is going on and what should be done about it. In addition the stance of agnosticism can seem overly detached and cynical. The research involved interviewing people who expressed strong opinions and emotions about the social impacts
of the road schemes. To suggest that the issue of whether these impacts are real or serious is irrelevant, can sometimes feel like a reluctance to take people seriously.

This sense is sometimes heightened by using a discourse analytic approach to explore the social construction of social impacts. The approach recommends taking the talk or text of participants as data and not attempting to go beyond that to draw conclusions about their attitudes, motives or values. While the analysis produced here illustrates the sense of this recommendation and the fruitful insights it can yield, at times this is a difficult position to maintain. Not paying attention to participants' values or motives can be seen as suggesting that they are valueless or motiveless. This not only runs counter to the researcher's common sense understanding of the situation, but is likely also to be offensive to those participating in the research. It is difficult to explain or justify the social constructionist approach to those who agree to participate in the research. A number of interviewees asked about the practical outcomes of the research, obviously hoping that it would further their case in some way. While it was made clear from the start that this was not the aim of the research at times I felt quite uneasy about this. Of course, as noted in Chapter 3 the relationship between research and policy or action is always a complex one, and a project with more practical aims would not necessarily have benefitted participants any more directly. In addition the dilemma about the ethics of doing research on, but not for, a group of people, is by no means unique to this project.

It has already been acknowledged that the thesis might have benefitted from a more thorough review of literature on discourse analysis. One of the problem encountered here, which wider reading might have helped resolve, is the extent to which discourse analysis can lead to significant insights about a substantive area of research. The sort of discourse analysis pursued here is largely concerned with the way in which talk is organised to achieve specific interactional aims. Most attention is paid to devices and strategies used to strengthen an argument, construct facts, and present speakers as reliable and credible. These strategies are important aspects of the construction of social impacts, but might be better characterised as routine features of arguments rather than anything specific to the construction of social impacts.
However given that social impacts have not been analyzed as social constructions before, these observations about the detailed construction of impacts as real and serious do make an important contribution to the understanding of the process of social impact. Drawing attention to the practical importance for participants of constructing winning arguments, and illustrating how they attempt to do this provides a novel contribution to the literature on social impacts which has tended to assume that impacts are caused mechanistically by new developments.

**Sociology of the Environment**

In Chapter 2 I argued that the concept of social impact is under theorised and that the literature on SIA would benefit from being more informed by sociology. The literature on SIA can be characterised as part of a wider literature on sociology of the environment, and in Chapter 3 I outlined the major debate in this field about the place and usefulness of social constructionist analyses of environmental issues. I pointed out that the bulk of research on social impacts has implicitly adopted a realist position, and suggested that considering social impacts as social constructions would provide useful insights about the process of impact. The remainder of the thesis drew on data from the two case studies to illustrate some of the detail of the social construction of social impacts. This analysis makes a distinctive contribution to the growing body of studies which provide social constructionist analyses of environmental issues. It is distinctive in that it engages with debates about social constructionism as well as providing an empirical analysis; and also in that the analysis is more localised than much of the existing research. It is localised in two senses: first it concentrates on the construction of environmental problems within specific localities, while many of the existing studies have chosen to focus on the construction of global environmental problems such as global warming or acid rain (see p42-51 for examples); and secondly in that the analysis focuses on the detailed rhetorical construction of environmental problems rather than looking at their wider social and political construction.

It is important that social constructionist studies of environmental issues are not considered as an area distinct from the Environmental Sociology pursued by those I have characterised as realists. As the discussion in Chapter 3 indicated most 'realists' acknowledge that social
constructionism provides some useful insights (p53-54), and the majority of social constructionist analyses slide towards a realist approach at times (p46-47, p55). Thus the distinction between the two approaches is not as clear as it sometimes appears. It is unlikely that sociology of the environment will ever be characterised by consensus, after all few (if any) other areas of sociological enquiry are. In common with other areas of interest within the discipline sociology of the environment should be broad enough to encompass a range of theoretical approaches and substantive interests.

The thesis also has relevance for research on public participation in planning disputes and local environmental debates. I have noted in Chapter 7 how existing studies have tended to focus on the way in which structural constraints affect interaction between the parties in planning disputes. I have taken a different angle and concentrated instead on illustrating the extent to which these divisions (between ordinary people and experts, us and them, NIMBYs and environmentalists) are actively achieved. Particularly significant is the conclusion that the identity of 'ordinary person' rather than simply disempowering participants is one that they actively invoke and utilise in the course of the dispute. Despite focusing throughout on the rhetorical strategies of participants I have attempted to avoid the suggestion that power inequalities or structural features of the planning process are insignificant. Although Giddens' theory of structuration provides some idea about the sort of framework that might be used to develop such a position it is not clear to what extent it is compatible with a thoroughgoing constructionist analysis. The relationship between the structural and active dimensions of planning disputes is an area that needs further careful thought.

The thesis also relates to an emerging research interest in lay epidemiology or citizen knowledges (e.g. Irwin, 1995, Brown 1991 & 1993). The observations made here about the way in which local participants in the disputes about the two road schemes ground their claims of impact in direct everyday experience, framed the issues as moral ones, and criticised the DoT's detached and 'objective' stance tie in with this literature. Irwin (1995) draws together a variety of case studies of disputes between members of the public and scientists about the severity and incidence of environmental risks. He examines the very different ways in which lay and expert participants assess risks and points particularly to
the way in which lay participants rely on contextual knowledge - direct everyday knowledge and experience - in order to assess risk. For lay participants the issues are localised. They are concerned with their own health and welfare and that of their friends and family, and with the safety and amenity of their local environment. Irwin describes the knowledge of the risks which they accumulate as 'knowledges for doing'- they are highly practical, case specific and instrumental in orientation (p133). In this respect too they contrast sharply with the knowledges of experts which tend to make claims to general theory and strive to retain distance from the particular. The public's contextual knowledge combines with assessments of the credibility of the institutions responsible for controlling the risks (see also p99) and often with research carried out by members of the public themselves. Irwin suggests that lay groups do not simply have a role in criticising expert knowledge but also in generating new forms of knowledge and understanding of risks, and stresses that:

    the point...is not to privilege either 'citizen' or 'scientific' understandings, but rather note the diversity of knowledges which seem relevant to risk/environmental issues. (ibid:115)

This lay epidemiology model seems to fit the Havant/Chichester case study particularly well. In Chapters 5 and 6 I illustrated how local people contrasted the DoT's detached assessment of the 'roar' unfavourably with their direct experience of it. They rejected the DoT's technical assessment and responses to the problem, characterising it instead in moral terms - as something they should not have been subjected to (see p106). Not only did they draw on their local and commonsense knowledge, but they also engaged in research to try to prove that their assessment of the problem was correct (see p95). Thus this case study could be rewritten as another example of lay epidemiology in action. It would make a novel contribution to this literature due to the nature of the problem about which local people were making claims. As its name suggests most of the lay epidemiology literature concentrates on citizens' claims making about potential threats to health (see especially Brown 1991 & 1993). In this case study local people were not making claims about something which they characterised as a risk, but about something which they considered already had direct impacts on their life. Moreover claims about the noise rarely drew on the effect it might have on health (although this could have been done - see p101), but instead concentrated on what might be considered more small scale changes to everyday life. This
case study could also be used to illustrate Irwin's argument that the incorporation of the contextual knowledge of local people into environmental decision making would result in a more credible and well-informed process. In this case the consequence of ignoring, or failing to understand, the local construction of the 'roar' was that a variety of expensive 'solutions' were invested in, none of which led to an abatement of claims about the problem. In fact the 'solutions' exacerbated complaints. If attempts had been made to understand the basis and nature of the complaints which local people were making it is possible that a solution acceptable to both 'sides' could have been reached more quickly and cheaply.

The analysis which has been carried out here also contributes to the work on lay epidemiologies in a different way. In exploring how the social impacts of the two roads were constructed by local people, attention has been drawn to the ways in which they construct their identity and their knowledge in particular ways in order to make their claims about impact more robust - a point not so far addressed in the lay epidemiology literature. I have demonstrated that rather than being neutral descriptions of people, being an ordinary person or a local person are identities which participants work to achieve, and use to particular ends. The ordinary and local knowledge which they can claim by virtue of these identities is also actively worked up. In addition the lay epidemiology approach assumes a realist position towards environmental risk - the emphasis is on citizens discovering or uncovering real risks. The analysis presented here differs from this in emphasising the way in which the reality and severity of problems is actively constructed by local people. The discovery of social impacts is conceptualised as a social process - as Woolgar writes 'discovery is a process rather than a point occurrence in time' (1988:58).

**Understanding Social Impacts**

The main aim of this thesis has been to contribute to understanding about social impacts by considering them as social constructions. Although the case studies are necessarily limited some general tentative suggestions about the process of social impact can be drawn. First the analysis has challenged the notion that social impacts are the direct result of technological changes to the natural environment (see p21). In place of this mechanistic model of the emergence of impacts I have provided examples of the way in which social
impacts are socially constructed. Claims about social impact are not the inevitable result of environmental changes, rather their very emergence and nature is heavily influenced by a range of social factors.

Couch and Kroll-Smith distinguish between environmental risks or threats, and impacts:

Unlike the certainty of impact, a threat is hemmed in by uncertainty...threats require a greater degree of interpretive work...they are frequently open to dispute. (1991:300)

and to date work on social and environmental impacts and that on risk has largely been seen as separate. However the analysis presented here suggests that this distinction is not so rigid. I have shown the extent to which the existence and severity of impacts is contested both between 'experts' and 'ordinary people', and between groups of 'ordinary people; the detailed work which participants engage in to construct the impacts as real, serious, and requiring attention; and the disputes which arise about the likelihood, existence or nature of impacts.

In Chapter 1 I noted how the literature on social impacts often employs a distinction between objective and subjective impacts - with objective impacts being those which are measurable by experts and subjective impacts being more intangible impacts such as distress at changes to the local environment. The analysis presented shows that impacts which are amenable to expert measurement are just as open to dispute and alternative interpretations as those which have traditionally been considered 'subjective'. I have made no attempt to assess the likelihood or severity of the social impacts of the road schemes studied. Rather the emphasis has been on how the impacts were socially constructed by local people. This focus contributes to an understanding of how complaints about social impacts emerge and are maintained, and highlights the active role played by local people in deciding what constitutes an impact and constructing it in a particular way.

Another important, if tentative, finding is that in constructing something as a social impact people do not necessarily describe its effects in dramatic ways. Rather they draw attention to small scale changes they have had to make to details of their everyday life - in the case of the A27 'roar' such things as not being able to hold a conversation in the garden or having to turn the radio up in order to hear it. These descriptions are used to suggest that
the impact is severe and needs to be rectified. It might be supposed that more dramatic
claims might serve this purpose better, but the analysis presented here suggests that the
opposite is the case. It is by drawing attention to small changes to mundane life that people
achieve the sense that an impact is real and serious.

An analysis of the social construction of social impacts may not seem directly relevant to
those involved in the practical process of SIA. However if practice does shift from site
specific assessments to more strategic assessments of policies and programs (as Finsterbuch
1994 suggests) then the approach could provide some important insights. Of particular
relevance is the recognition that a range of social factors inform whether there is local
identification of the existence of an impact, and whether complaint about that impact is
maintained. While the detail of impact identification and the organisation of opposition will
differ in each site, there will be commonalities in the process by which impacts are
identified. An awareness of these factors is an essential starting point for any assessment
of the likely social impact of programmes or policies.

In this thesis social impacts have been taken to be those aspects of new developments
which local people consider will affect their lives, or already have affected their lives. This
definition is challenged by a number of writers on SIA who argue that social impacts are
not just what people complain about. Clearly a project may have some affects on social
life which are positive, in addition the recognition that a range of social factors inform
whether an issue is constructed as problematic leads to the realisation that there are likely
to also be a range of factors which constrain the emergence of complaint about other issues.
A SIA should also draw attention to these issues. However the issues which local people
complain about are those which become real problems for the developers (see discussion
p110 about how the problem for DoT was the noise local people made about the noise from
the road). As the analysis in Ch5 illustrated if developers fail to understand how local
people are constructing an impact their attempts to ameliorate impacts may actually
exacerbate complaints (see p113-114). With the case of the A27 roar the DoT responded
to local peoples claims that the road was noisy, but failed to engage with the moral
character of their claims (that they had been treated unfairly, let down etc - see p100). An
understanding of how an impact is locally constructed is a prerequisite to effective dialogue
between the parties about possible resolutions.

My experience of conducting an SIA (of the A27 Worthing/Lancing) confirmed the observation made by a number of authors (e.g. Jobes 1985, Freudenberg and Olsen 1983) that SIA is generally a quick and dirty process. While welcoming the advent of developers’ concerns to identify and ameliorate social impacts, involvement in the practical task of SIA is likely to be frustrating and compromising for a sociologist. So long as SIAs are commissioned by developers there is little chance of conducting an unbiased assessment, and even if this is possible the data ultimately belongs to the developer who is free to emphasise conclusions which are favourable to their plans and downplay or ignore those which are more negative. In the UK discussions about the importance of considering social impacts alongside environmental impacts is just beginning. At this stage the most productive role for sociologists is to contribute to this debate, whether through advice on appropriate research methods or through more theoretical discussions which contribute to an understanding of the process of social impact.

Case studies such as those presented here play an important complementary role to the practical task of SIA. They provide an opportunity to explore issues such as how social impacts are experienced and expressed in more detail than is possible in the course of an actual SIA. The relationship between research and practice in SIA is no less convoluted than in any other area (see p60), but it is hoped that aspects of the analysis presented here might inform, or at least interest, practitioners.

In conclusion the aim of the thesis has been to demonstrate that the social impacts of new developments are socially constructed. Despite the limited scope of the research and the acknowledgement of nagging theoretical dilemmas about social constructionism, the research has led to several key insights. I have illustrated that far from being a mechanistic response to technological changes to the environment, social impact is a fundamentally social process. Like risks, impacts are the subject of uncertainty, debate and dispute. I have drawn attention to the detailed rhetorical work that goes into the construction of social impacts, and drawn attention particularly to the role played by identity in this process. A number of areas where further research would be useful have been suggested. These
include testing the applicability of the conclusions drawn about the process of social impact to other planning disputes; developing a model of the relationship between structural factors and active construction in environmental and planning disputes; and exploring how widespread the use of ordinary identity and claims about changes to everyday life are in the construction of a range of environmental impacts.
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