

Society and Environment

Lesson No.	Title	Activity
22	Society and Environment	Make an analysis of environmental crisis in your state and prepare a report on causes and consequences of environmental pollution.

Summary

Environment can be described as the natural world of land, water, air, plants and animals around us which forms the basis of our existence. The external world influences the growth of people, animals or plants, the living or working conditions of man, etc.

Therefore, it is of utmost significance in sociology to understand the relationship between society and environment and to look into the societal-environmental interactions.

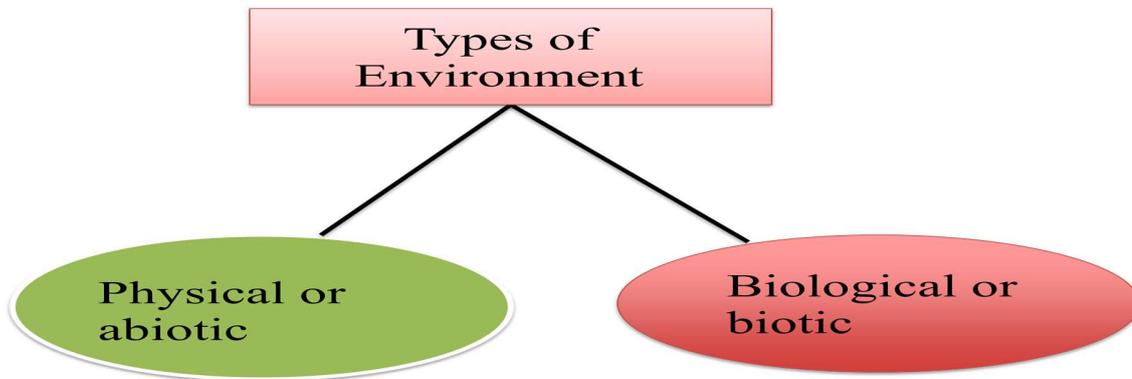
Meaning of Environment

The term environment has been derived from a French word "Environia" which means to surround or to encompass. The environment is constituted by the interacting systems of physical, biological and cultural elements which are closely inter-linked individually as well as collectively in many ways.

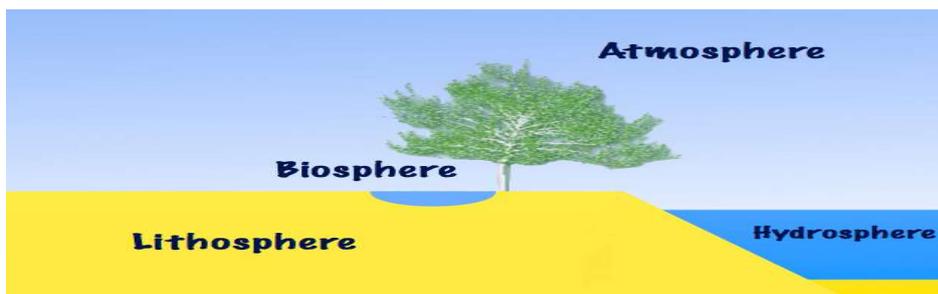
Physical elements (space, landform, water bodies, climate, soils, rocks and minerals) determine the variable character of the human habitat, its opportunities as well as its limitations. Biological elements (plants, animals, micro-organisms and man) constitute the biosphere; cultural elements (economic, social and political) are essentially man-made features, which go into the making of cultural milieu.

Types of Environment

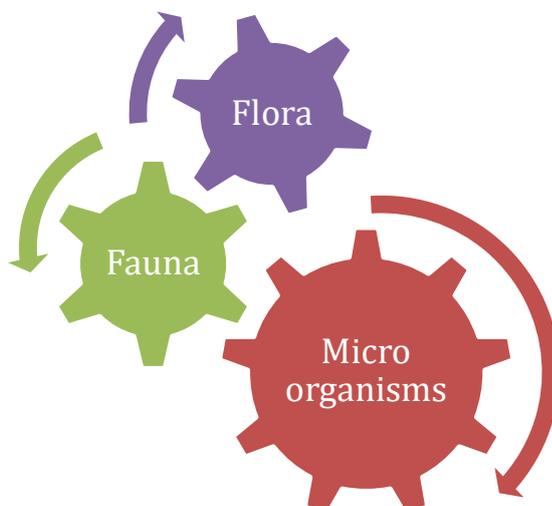
The environment includes both the non-living (abiotic) and living (biotic) components. These together form the basic structure of the environment. It is here that the close interaction between man and the environment takes place.



Based on the physical characteristics, the abiotic or non-living environment is divided into four broad categories. They can be seen as follows-



On the other hand, the biotic components of the environment have three categories which are as follows



Relationship between Society and Environment

In sociology, the relationship between man and environment has always been of particular interest to sociologists. There are various aspects and various periods have evolved in the journey of the relationship of man to his environment. Of all the organisms, man is the most skilled and civilized and therefore, it is significant to note the following three aspects of man to understand the relationship between man and environment.:

- (i) **Physical** man is a component of the biological community and as such, requires basic elements of physical environment such as air, water, food and habitat etc, like other biological population and release wastes in the eco-system.
- (ii) **Social** man establishes the social institutions, forms the social organizations and formulates laws and policies to safeguard his existence, interests and welfare,
- (iii) **Economic** man derives and utilizes resource from the physical and biological environment with his skills and technologies.

The changing relationship of man with the environment from pre-historic to modern times can be divided into the following four periods:

- (a) Hunting and food gathering.
- (b) Animal domestication and pastoralism.
- (c) Plant domestication and agriculture.
- (d) Science, technology and industrialization.

Biosphere and Socio-Sphere

The **biosphere** is the life supporting layer which surrounds the earth and makes the existence of life possible on this planet. It consists of all the living organisms (the biotic component), energy (energy component) and physical environment (abiotic component). There are continuous interactions between living organisms and physical environment and also among the living organisms themselves.

The **socio-sphere**, on the other hand, helps man to fulfil his basic instinct to be social and be a part of a social group. Different social groups and social structures like industrial, agricultural, political, cultural, religious and aesthetic etc. have evolved and developed during various stages of development of human civilization and these social structures represent man's accumulated cultural resources primarily based on natural environment. Density and distribution of population, social differentiation, cultural variations, character of economic, political, social, religious organizations and all social phenomena contribute in the making of the socio sphere.

Effects of Environment on Human Society

The effect of the environment has been emerging as a major challenge today and poses serious threats to life because of its hazardous effects. Exploitation or over exploitation of natural resources and the industrial revolution have brought in serious changes in the biotic and abiotic components of the human environment.

Natural processes or human factors sometimes aggravate natural environmental process to cause disaster for human society like earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, cyclones etc.). They result in heavy loss of life and property. Environmental hazards for human health are as follows:

- (i) Air pollution causes respiratory diseases.
- (ii) Water pollution causes enteric diseases.
- (iii) Solid waste pollution causes vector-borne diseases.
- (iv) Toxic waste causes cancer and neurological disorders

Therefore, education must arouse awareness about the effects of environment, as clean environment is precious for human society.

Evaluate Yourself

1. Explain the kind of environment based on the basic structure.
2. How would you describe 'social man' with regard to relationship between man and environment?
3. Describe the concept of 'Biosphere' with examples.
4. Explain what factors led to changes in environment over a period of time?
5. How do you think that education can help to reduce environmental pollution?