

The Public's Perception of the Seriousness of Environmental Crimes Related to Environmental Pollution and Illegal Waste Trade. A Case Study of the Province of Brescia, Italy



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BETWEEN HUMAN
VULNERABILITIES
AND ENVIRONMENTAL
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RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

This original research delves into the public's awareness of environmental crimes related to pollution and illegal waste operations in Brescia, Italy. It investigates residents' perceptions of the seriousness of environmental crimes occurring in their proximity. Brescia is an ideal location for this type of study as it features the largest density of dumpsites in Northern Italy and nationwide concerning polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) contamination rates.

This article combines the theoretical approaches of green criminology and sociology to qualitatively explain public perception regarding victimless crimes and slow violence. The data derives from content analysis performed on open-ended responses to an online survey. The findings support a framework to explore the perception of environmental crimes' seriousness, suggesting five essential aspects of analysis: the concepts of environment, crime, violence, harm, and victimization. It also assesses both how these perceptions change whenever organized crime groups are involved in illegal waste trade activities, and the human vulnerabilities that arise.

The findings suggest the need for several interventions at the legislative level. It highlights how weaknesses within institutions make them inadequate to prevent corruption and illegal waste trade. There is also a lack of civil society engagement to counter these effects and an unsatisfactory way in which media channels circulate information concerning these crimes, showing that the phenomenon of the perceptions of environmental crimes is understudied. Indeed, studies about perceptions are an essential starting point to creating the solution and more specific legislation that can properly protect the interests of both the environment and people.

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