



2nd ISSP User Conference – Environment

Online, 4 December 2023 12:30-16:30 (CET)

Organized by the ISSP Secretariat and the Editors of the planned special issue of the International Journal of Sociology (IJS) on the ISSP “Environment IV” module.

Program:

12:30 – 12:40: Short welcome and introduction to the ISSP

Stephanie Steinmetz (University of Lausanne)

12:40 – 13:40: Session 1: Attitudes & perceptions towards the environment

Chair: tbd

1. Exploring Environmental Attitude Changes in Japan and Germany 1993-2020

Joanna Kitsnik, & Carola Hommerich (Sophia University, Japan)

2. Climate Change Risk Perception Gap: Climate Change Exposure and Perceived Impacts in Cross-National Perspective

Aistė Balžekienė, & Audronė Telešienė (Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania)

3. Understanding Environmental Skepticism in Central Europe: Evidence from the International Social Survey Programme Environment Module (2020)

Bruno Šimac, Vladimir Ivanović, & Tijana Trako Poljak (University of Zagreb, Croatia)

4. Inhibiting or Contributing? How Global Liberal Forces Impact Climate Change Skepticism

Jessica Kim, Yasemin Soysal (both WZB Berlin, Germany), Hector Cebolla Boado (Spanish National Research Council (CSIC) Madrid, Spain), Laura Schimmöller (Free University Berlin, Germany)

Break 15 min

13:55 – 14:40: Session 2: Institutional trust and environmental policy

Chair: tbd

5. Using the Campbell paradigm to understand the role of institutional trust in environmental policy support

Jan Urban, & Ewa Duda (Charles University, Prague)

6. Environmental Insecurity and Institutional Trust Deficit: A Framework Analysis of Pro-Environmental Behaviour

Chinglen Laishram (University of Baroda, India), & TK Singh (Central University of Gujarat, India)

7. Institutional trust and climate policy preference - Evidence from Iceland

Sóllilja Bjarnadóttir (University of Iceland, Iceland), Malcolm Fairbrother (Umeå University, Sweden), Sigrún Ólafsdóttir (University of Iceland, Iceland), & Jason Beckfield (Harvard University, Cambridge, United States)

Break 15 min

14:55 – 15:55: Session 3: Equity, equality & inclusion

Chair: tbd

8. The Relationship Between Subjectively Reported Experiences of Negative Environmental Effects and Environmental Activist Behaviours

Vaidas Morkevicius, Egle Butkeviciene, & Audrone Telesiene (Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania)

9. Do “environmental losers” pay the price? The role of individual vulnerabilities in the relationship between environmental concern and willingness to protect the environment

Marta Moroni & Giulia Dotti Sani (Università degli studi di Milano, Italy)

10. Ladies first? The positive effect of gender equality on women’s environmental political participation across countries

Summer Isaacson (University of Konstanz, Germany)

11. Environmental agency as a key component of sustainability competence

Maaris Raudsepp, Triin Roosalu, Margarita Kazjulja, Marti Taru, Jelena Helemäe, Eve-Liis Roosmaa, Kairit Kall, & Pille Ubakivi-Hadachi (Tallinn University, Estonia)

15:55 – 16:10: Closure of the conference

Exploring Environmental Attitude Changes in Japan and Germany 1993-2020

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Amidst an ecological crisis, the need for a fundamental shift away from growth-dependent capitalist ideology towards alternative social visions prioritizing social and ecological well-being is crucial. However, this transformation is unlikely to occur soon enough, highlighting the importance of environmental attitudes and awareness in driving systemic changes. Citizens' active demand for change and a “revolution in consciousness” (Alexander, 2015) at the individual level are necessary for achieving significant change. This presentation examines whether and how environmental attitudes have changed over the past three decades, while the threat of the climate crisis has become more and more imminent and tangible. We compare Japan and Germany, two countries with comparable levels of economic development and political power in their respective geographical regions, but very different environmental policy prioritisation and subsequently climate change performance. According to the latest Climate Change Performance Index Germany ranks 16th and Japan ranks 50th (Burk et al., 2022).

Using data from the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) Environment module for Japan and Germany from the years 1993, 2000, 2010, and 2020, we investigate the prominent trends in environmental consciousness. We apply an explorative and descriptive approach to uncover the generational differences in the two countries while paying particular attention to four key themes: general salience of environmental issues, the relationship between economic growth and environmental impact, willingness to make sacrifices for environmental protection, and individual agency.

The findings reveal an overall upsurge in environmental concern in both countries. In Japan, this concern is more pronounced among older age groups, while in Germany, particularly recognizing climate change as urgent, compared to other environmental issues spans across all age groups, surpassing that in Japan. Notably, a significant discrepancy emerges regarding the willingness of younger age groups to make personal sacrifices for the environment. Young people in Japan display a lower inclination toward such sacrifices, while the reverse trend is observed in Germany. Additionally, Japanese individuals across all age groups prioritize individual-level environmental actions to a much lesser extent in addition to perceiving less personal responsibility for environmental stewardship compared to their German counterparts. Over time Germany has become increasingly critical towards the idea of economic growth as a prerequisite for environmental protection, whereas belief in a growth-driven approach to environmental protection remains strong in Japan.

In general, we observed a heightened awareness and apprehension regarding environmental issues at the individual level, but this heightened awareness doesn't necessarily translate into a corresponding eagerness to take action. The varying institutional settings offer insights into

the reasons for these patterns. In Germany, the presence of the Green Party in the government has pushed forward structural changes in policies, and the strong and active environmental movement which functions as external corrective to the government, seem to result in more urgency and personal commitment toward environmental protection. Conversely, in Japan, the government-led approach lacks strong regulations, relying mostly on soft recommendations to businesses and emphasizing "green growth". In the absence of both, a strong opposition party and an active environmental movement, there is less impetus for individuals to believe in the power of individual action.

Keywords: Environmental concern, Environmental sociology, International comparative analysis, Japan, Germany,

References:

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Climate Change Risk Perception Gap: Climate Change Exposure and Perceived Impacts in Cross-National Perspective

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Keywords: risk perception; climate change exposure; perceived impacts of climate change

Cross-national studies of climate change (CC) risk perception find between-countries variability to be less than the within-country variability (Weber, 2016). Cross-national data also shows that classical socio-demographic factors are not explaining significant share of variability in CC risk perception. Brulle, Carmichael and Jenkins (2012) in their meta-analysis refer to studies proving that increasing temperatures, floods, and other extreme events such as hurricanes and droughts are associated with individual recognition of CC and increased salience of the issue. Further literature review shows supporting empirical evidence for the strong impact of the role of personal experience (most often – with extreme weather events) on the concern over CC risks (Spence et al, 2011; Myers et al, 2013; Rudman, McLean, Bunzl, 2013; Budescu, Broomell and Por, 2015; Weber 2013). The aim of the presentation is to further analyze how CC risk perception is related to CC impact perception in countries with different CC risk exposure. We employ data driven analytical approach and identify within-countries population clusters with regards to their perceptions of CC local impacts and CC risk perceptions. Empirical analysis is based on International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) module “Environment” 2020-2022 data (GESIS, Cologne. Data file Version 1.0.0). First, the countries participating in the ISSP survey are classified into three groups according to their exposure to CC on the basis of the Global Climate Change Risk Index (by Germanwatch) – high, medium and low CC risk countries. Second, two step cluster analysis is performed in these three groups, based on two variables: CC risk perception and the perception of local impact of CC. Third, socio-demographic and attitudinal characteristics for the three clusters are analyzed. Results show that the largest cluster is characterized by high CC risk perception and low perceived impact of CC. The smallest cluster was characterized by low CC risk perception and medium perceived CC impacts. And the remaining cluster was characterized by high CC risk perception and high perceived impact of CC. Socio-demographic characteristics were not significant predictors of CC risk perception (as expected), except top-bottom self-placement, in neither of the three country groups. Across all CC risk country groups, respondents with high-risk perception and low perceived CC impacts are most common. This indicates the risk and impact perception gap. Both in high CC risk and in low CC risk countries there are more “under-worried” respondents (low risk, medium impact perceptions) than the ones whose CC risk perceptions correspond to the perception of impact (high risk, high impact perceptions). Our findings highlight inadequacies and gaps in public perception of climate change that we want to explain with reference to literature discussing biases in subjective interpretations of CC impacts, and also by referring to the literature highlighting that other, non-experience based factors might also be significant when explaining CC risk perceptions, e.g. attenuation of extreme weather events risks by media (Brulle, Carmichael and Jenkins, 2012), beliefs about climate change (these influence subjective reporting of experiences; Howe, Leiserowitz, 2013), recency of experiences (Weber, 2016) or discrepancy between geographical distribution of population versus distribution of areas affected by CC (Weber, 2016).

Analysis was conducted as part of “Social Solutions to the Climate Crisis: Behavioral Profiles and Targeted Communication (KLIM-KOM)” project implemented at Kaunas University of Technology. This project has received funding from the Research Council of Lithuania (LMTLT), agreement No S-MIP-22-26.

**Understanding Environmental Skepticism in Central Europe: Evidence from the
International Social Survey Programme Environment Module (2020)**

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Croatia

In light of the escalating global ecological crisis, it becomes increasingly imperative to gain deeper insights into public perspectives on environmental issues and the determinants connected to it. This paper endeavors to explore the beliefs of Central Europeans regarding the reality and significance of environmental problems, as well as their connection with environmental attitudes and pro-environmental behavior. Drawing from cross-national data originating from the Environment IV module of the ISSP (2020) across six Central European countries (Austria, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Slovakia, and Slovenia), this research embarks on two central inquiries: 1. Are there significant differences in environmental skepticism among these six observed countries? and 2. What are the principal determinants of environmental skepticism in this region? In line with the aforementioned research questions and existing research, we hypothesized that Central Europeans would generally exhibit a limited degree of environmental skepticism. However, respondents in Austria and Germany would display notably lower levels of environmental skepticism compared to their counterparts in the other four observed Central European countries (Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia, and Slovenia). For the purposes of this study, we constructed an *Environmental Skepticism Scale* (ESS) based on available ISSP data. The ESS comprises five items probing notions such as the redundancy of pro-environmental actions and doubts regarding the possibility of affecting change in environmental protection. We examined the correlations between the ESS and items on environmental attitudes and behavior, social and institutional trust, as well as respondents' individual characteristics. While our findings generally indicate that Central Europeans tend not to be environmental skeptics, a nuanced regional breakdown reveals that respondents from Slovakia exhibit the highest levels of environmental skepticism, followed by Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia, and Austria. Germany, on the other hand, reports the lowest levels of environmental skepticism in the region. The study used Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA) which identified robust predictors of higher ESS scores, encompassing diminished environmental concern, skepticism regarding anthropogenic

contributions to climate change, prioritizing economic interests over environmental protection, hesitance to allocate financial resources to environmental safeguarding, and limited engagement in pro-environmental activities and activism. These insights shed light on the complex landscape of environmental attitudes in Central Europe and provide valuable guidance for crafting more effective environmental policies and outreach initiatives in the region. This research was conducted as part of the scientific project SECRURAL funded by the Croatian National Science Foundation (UIP-2019-04-5257).

Keywords: Environmental Skepticism; Central Europe; Environmental Concern; Pro-Environmental Behavior; Pro-Environmental activism

Inhibiting or Contributing? How Global Liberal Forces Impact Climate Change Skepticism

By:

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Key words: Climate change skepticism; world society theory; cultural dissonance; anti-liberalism; ISSP

Abstract: Since the 1970s, a global environmental regime, legitimated by scientific theories and supported by a myriad of international treaties and organizations, has emerged and rapidly expanded (Hironaka 2014). Nearly every nation-state today possesses some form of domestic framework devoted to environmental protection and is party to multilateral environmental negotiations. Public and educational campaigns since the 1980s have additionally raised concern, awareness, and knowledge about environmental change and its harmful effects (Bromley, Meyer and Ramirez 2011). Yet, despite longstanding pro-environmentalism in the liberal world order, by the late-2000s, climate change and environmental degradation became a battleground for local, national, and global forces as growing public doubt about environmental trends became apparent (Capstick et al. 2015). Today, sizeable proportions of citizens around the world exhibit skepticism towards scientific claims of climate change, a top environmental threat (Zhou 2014).

Environmental and climate skepticism forms part of a broader landscape of populist contestations of previously established global liberal norms and frameworks (Cole, Schofer and Velasco 2023, Jepperson and Meyer 2021). Widely depicted as “globalization backlash,” these contestations have seen a worldwide surge since the 2000s. Consequently, a significant body of recent literature examines how economic instability and political cleavages triggered by globalization contribute to climate skepticism (Buzogány and Mohamad-Klotzbach 2021, Meyer 2022). While these studies emphasize the global factors enabling climate skepticism, their potential to counteract such attitudes remains unexplored. World society research notably has demonstrated that linkages with global cultural frameworks foster liberally grounded environmental values (Frank, Hironaka and Schofer 2000, Hironaka 2014). However, few, if any, investigate whether these linkages inhibit *anti-liberal* populist sentiments—of which climate skepticism is one manifestation. Indeed,

climate skepticism is largely driven by distrust in global liberal institutions, elites and scientists advancing the agenda to address climate-change (Huber, Greussing and Eberl 2022). Yet we know little about how liberal global forces mitigate climate skepticism, particularly amidst nascent illiberalism.

Using multilevel modeling to analyze three waves of International Social Survey Program data spanning 37 countries from 2000 to 2020, we ask, “*how does exposure to liberal global forces attenuate climate skepticism?*” To answer this question, we evaluate the impact of nations’ embeddedness within global liberal frameworks on climate skepticism—both generally, and amid anti-liberal pushback. Controlling for various political, economic, and socio-demographic characteristics, we find that global liberal embeddedness is linked to reduced skepticism. However, when global liberal forces encounter anti-liberal undercurrents within nation-states, a situation we refer to as *cultural dissonance*, the impact of liberal world society on tempering skepticism varies. Embeddedness mitigates skepticism at the national level, particularly within authoritarian regimes, but not at the individual level, especially among right-wing individuals. Paradoxically, world society also heightens ideological polarization of individual worldviews on climate change. By illuminating the contradictory role of liberal world society, which simultaneously exacerbates and inhibits anti-liberal, populist attitudes about climate change, our analytic framework advances existing work examining the post-liberal turn and holds promise for making sense of other issue domains where liberal perspectives are contested.

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Using the Campbell paradigm to understand the role of institutional trust in environmental policy support

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Abstract

Previous studies have shown that institutional trust is associated with people's support for some environmental policies (e.g., support for higher taxation) but not others (e.g., support for subsidies and bans; e.g., Davidovic and Haring, 2020; Fairbrother et al., 2019, Hammar and Jagers, 2006). Such findings seem to contradict the notion that institutional trust helps to resolve social dilemmas and thus facilitates collective action on environmental problems. In the current study, we use the conceptual framework of the attitudinal theory of the Campbell paradigm (Kaiser et al. 2010) to explain the seemingly contradictory effect of institutional trust on environmental policy support. Using the ISSP (2020) dataset collected in 28 countries, we confirm previous findings of the inconsistent relationship between individual-level institutional trust and different types of environmental policy support. However, as predicted by the Campbell paradigm, we also find that country-level institutional trust consistently predicts environmental policy support across environmental policy types. This is possible because average institutional trust at the country level (rather than at the individual level) captures the average behavioral costs associated with supporting policies that involve social dilemmas. The current study highlights the important role of institutional trust in facilitating support for environmental policies.

Keywords: policy support; pro-environmental behavior; the Campbell paradigm; behavioral cost;

Environmental Insecurity and Institutional Trust Deficit: A Framework Analysis of Pro-Environmental Behaviour.

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With the expansion of the definition of ‘security’, particularly through the introduction of ‘non-traditional security’ within securitization theory by the Copenhagen School and its scholars, the concept of environmental security (or insecurity in the case of lack therein, such as being a victim or facing the threat of water pollution, air pollution, or a major disruptive climate event) has become one of the crucial areas of exploration. The present study attempts to determine whether citizens’ pro-environmental behavior—the propensity to follow actions aimed at avoiding harm to and/or safeguarding the environment—is shaped by their experience of forms of environmental insecurity. Conceptually, the fear or experience of environmental insecurity can trigger a sense of responsibility among citizens, leading them to adopt or advocate for sustainable practices to reduce the risk of further environmental harm. Further, the existing literature has indicated that high institutional trust—a feeling of confidence toward formal institutes such as universities, news media, business and industry, and the national parliament, among others— is associated with a greater willingness to adopt environmental behavior. Hence, the present study also explores how institutional trust plays an intervening role in the linkages between environmental insecurity and pro-environmental behavior. The present study uses the latest ‘ISSP Environment module’ dataset, which includes a large, nationally representative sample (N=44,100) covering 28 societies, to quantify three key indicators: environmental insecurity, institutional trust, and pro-environmental behavior. Different indices were created using exploratory factor analysis (EFA). While doing so, appropriate rotation of the data was employed. After EFA, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted along with examining the reliability and validity statistics of the key constructs/indices. Multivariate statistical models—multi-level mixed effect—were constructed to estimate the causal path from environmental insecurity to pro-environmental behavior. This was implemented by building various models with and without various controls (such as the GDP and inequality index). In the next step, the path from environmental insecurity to pro-environmental behavior was further explored by looking at the intervening role of institutional trust. Institutional trust was treated as a moderating variable, and different slopes across different levels of institutional trust were examined. As expected, the results indicated a significant impact of environmental insecurity on pro-environmental behavior and a significant moderating role of institutional trust. This finding was consistent across different levels of societal development, including underdeveloped, developing, and developed countries. The present study is a valuable addition to the literature in a comparative cross-national context to determine citizens’ pro-environmental behavior.

Keywords: *environmentalism, pro-environmental behavior, environmental insecurity, institutional trust, ISSP*

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Institutional trust and climate policy preference

Evidence from Iceland

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17 October 2023

Institutional trust and climate policy preferences: Evidence from Iceland

Existing research shows that public attitudes towards climate policies reflect people's political trust. Past studies have used relatively narrow definitions and measures of trust, and which forms of trust matter remains unclear. In this paper, taking inspiration from works by Ostrom and Rothstein, we consider multiple and, in some cases, broader measures of trust. Using new data from Iceland (ISSP, 2020), we find that individuals with different levels of institutional trust hold different attitudes towards three key climate policies: taxation of fossil fuels, subsidies for renewable energy, and just transition support for workers. More narrowly defined political trust, in contrast, correlates only with attitudes towards taxes. These results suggest that confidence in climate action generally reflects people's overall beliefs about societal functioning, but attitudes towards taxation of fossil fuels specifically depend more narrowly on views of the state. Our work is also among the first to examine quantitatively public attitudes towards just transition support, which entails assistance to workers who have lost their jobs because of new climate policies.

Keywords: Climate policies, political trust, institutional trust, collective action, Just Transition

The Relationship Between Subjectively Reported Experiences of Negative Environmental Effects and Environmental Activist Behaviours

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Across the world, scientists have documented increasing negative environmental impacts, that not only have significant adverse effects on the environment, but continuously bring damage to human settlements, threaten human health and safety (UNEP Global Environmental Outlook, 2019). At the same time, in many countries, we have witnessed the new developments and growth of mobilization of environmental activism (Dalton, 2015). ISSP-Environment 2020 surveys have made it possible to test the extent to which these two processes are linked. The most recent ISSP-Environment module contains variables for measuring subjectively reported experiences of adverse environmental effects, including air pollution, water pollution and extreme weather events. This survey module also contains the classic variables measuring environmental activism, including items on signing a petition, giving money to environmental group, or taking part in a protest.

The aim of this paper is to analyze what is the relationship between subjectively reported experiences of negative environmental impacts, and environmental activist behaviors. The paper will first present the general patterns of environmental activist behaviors. It will also explore the change of these behaviors over time (comparing data from different ISSP-Environment survey waves). The presentation will further explore regional-geographical differences among the countries. The paper will contribute to the broader academic discussion on the factors influencing environmental activist behaviors. In particular, it will contribute to the field of research on the impact of internal factors and external situational factors on environmentally significant behavior.

This paper employs data from the *International Social Survey Programme* module *Environment III* (conducted in 2010) and *Environment IV* (conducted in 2020 (first release)).

Keywords: ISSP, environmental activism, environmental impacts.

References:

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Do “environmental losers” pay the price? The role of individual vulnerabilities in the relationship between environmental concern and willingness to protect the environment

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Keywords: environmental concern, climate change, willingness to pay, individual vulnerabilities, ISSP

Climate change and global warming constitute serious threats to human societies: temperatures are sharply increasing and natural disasters are becoming more frequent. The last IPCC report (2023) alerted us that the current efforts to decrease emissions are not sufficient to avoid the most dramatic consequences of climate change and that it is urgent to increase the number and pace of the interventions. In this context, the opinions and behaviours of citizens are of extreme importance for the policymaking of climate policies. Yet, while environmental concern is widespread and people are aware of the risks posed by climate change, only a minority is willing to bear individual economic costs when it comes to taking action to protect the environment.

This article contributes to literature by analysing the relationship between environmental concern and willingness to pay to protect the environment. Specifically we explore the role of vulnerabilities toward climate change – i.e., the extent to which respondents are exposed to its negative consequences – in shaping the association both at the individual and at the country-level.

First, we test if subjects who express greater concern toward the environment are also, overall, more willing to pay to protect it (H1). Second, we examine whether concern is more likely to translate into willingness to pay among subjects who are more vulnerable to climate change due to personal characteristics (namely youth, parents with children living in the household, and those who experienced poor environmental conditions in their neighbourhood during the last year) (H2). Third, we ask if the relationship between concern for the environment and willingness to pay varies across countries that are differently affected by environmental threats (H3).

To address these research questions, the Environmental module of the International Social Survey Programme collected in 28 countries in 2020/2023 is used for the analysis. The analysis entails using multilevel linear regression models to examine the impact of concern for the environment on the willingness to pay to protect it across countries. We incorporate interaction effects to determine whether the association between concern and willingness to pay varies based on the three individual vulnerabilities. Lastly, we test if these relationships vary across different contexts, assessing the effect of climate vulnerability at the country level.

Our results show that concern for the environment and willingness to pay to protect it are positively associated in most countries, albeit with differences in the strength of the relationship. As regards climate vulnerabilities, young individuals and those who have experienced extreme weather events are more willing to pay to protect the environment, while parents are less willing in comparison to those who do not have children living in the household. Despite the direct effect of individual climate vulnerabilities on willingness to pay, we do not find any moderation effect: the association between environmental concern and willingness to pay does not vary among respondents who are differently vulnerable to climate change, but rather individual vulnerabilities have a separate influence on the willingness to pay.

Abstract submission for the ISSP User Conference

October 2023

Summer Isaacson

Preliminary title:

“Ladies first? The positive effect of gender equality on women’s environmental political participation across countries”

Abstract:

Research on gender differences in environmental behavior has long claimed that women engage less than men in environmental political participation like protests and petitions, despite their higher levels of environmental concern and vulnerability. Using recent data from the ISSP’s 2020 Environment IV module, including a total of 44,100 observations from Austria, China, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Iceland, India, Italy, Japan, Korea, Rep., Lithuania, New Zealand, Norway, the Philippines, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, and the USA, we revisit the gender gap in environmental political participation. We ask, firstly, are there consistent gender differences in forms of environmental political participation across countries? Secondly, does a country’s level of gender equality matter more for women’s engagement than for men’s? Arguing that increasing gender equality and socio-economic development can and has allowed women to voice their environmental grievances, we use multi-level mixed-effects logistic regression models to examine the effects of macro-level gender inequality on gender differences in environmental protests, petitions, and boycotts. By distinguishing both individual from collective, and non-confrontational from confrontational engagement forms, this study offers an encompassing understanding of gendered patterns of participation. In accordance with our expectations, results show that women do participate more in environmental political participation than men, but mainly in individual and non-confrontational forms (petitions, boycotts), whereas confrontational forms (protests) are more gender equal, though with substantial variation across countries. Moreover, considering how women have historically been restrained from participating in politics, we argue that structural gender inequality remains an important limitation to women’s engagement. Supporting this hypothesis, cross-level interactions show that in more egalitarian countries, women are more likely to engage in almost all types of environmental political participation than men. The study offers new perspectives and findings on gender differences in environmental political participation, and highlights the impact of gender inequality on women’s participation in particular.

Keywords: environmental activism, political participation, gender equality, pro-environmental behavior

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Jelena Helemäe¹, Eve-Liis Roosmaa¹, Kairit Kall¹, Pille Ubakivi-Hadachi¹

Environmental agency as a key component of sustainability competence

Abstract proposed for 2nd ISSP User Conference on Environment

Sustainability competences include the ability and willingness to participate in the circular economy by making pro-environmental behavioral choices (for example, by collecting and sorting domestic waste, by accepting recycled materials in consumer goods or by avoiding to buy certain products for environmental reasons). Supporting the development of sustainability competences, eg by policy interventions and social marketing but also in education and learning contexts (Para et al., 2020), requires an understanding of facilitators and obstacles to sustainability competences and variability in different segments of population along relevant dimensions and characteristics of sustainability.

Earlier studies (e.g. Telesiene & Gross, 2018; Gilg, et al. 2005; Goldman et al., 2021, Saari et al., 2021)) and analysis of Eurobarometer and ISSP data (Roosmaa et al., 2023) reveal that personal agency beliefs and environmental responsibility are relevant facilitators of pro-environmental behavior choices and sustainable lifestyles. The construct of environmental agency can be conceptualized as an aspect of environmental identity (see Blanchard & Paquet, 2023). However, it is also relevant to consider how agency is bounded by environmental barriers and individual capabilities (Evans, 2002).

In this paper we use ISSP data to segment the sample into distinct groups according to their level of environmental agency. We use cluster analysis of a battery of questions on personal responsibility and agency in ISSP environment modules III and IV. We show how the distinguished subgroups differ in their degree of environmental concern and prevalence of sustainability practices (sorting waste for recycling and avoiding to buy certain products for environmental reasons), as well as sociodemographically. We compare the variability and change of environmental agency in 4 countries: Estonia, Finland, Spain and Germany, which expose different structural and cultural conditions for environmental agency (Meyer et al., 2022).

Taking into account the variability in the level of environmental agency among population and in different generations is necessary for planning effective interventions - targeted social marketing and educational campaigns that aim to promote sustainability competences.

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