

REPORT ON THE SECOND ISSP USER CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENTAL ATTITUDES

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The International Social Survey Program (ISSP) organized its second user conference on the 4th of December 2023 with presentations based on the 2020 Environmental module. The ISSP environmental module covers normative, cognitive and behavioral aspects of environmental attitudes. The normative aspect is measured by items such as opinions on human intrusion in nature, animal rights or the governments' role in environmental protection. The cognitive component of environmental attitudes is captured by items related to knowledge about environmental protection or the influence of human activity on climate change. The behavioral aspect is measured by willingness to sacrifice resources for the benefit of the environment or being member of environmental organizations. The Environment module of ISSP has been fielded three times before the 2020 survey in 1993, 2000 and 2010, allowing for cross-country and over time comparisons. This module has been used for cross-national study of environmental attitudes by researchers worldwide.

The conference has been organized in three sessions. The first set of presentations explored attitudes and perceptions towards the environment, the second session included presentations exploring the links between institutional trust and environmental policy, while the third session studied issues related to equality and inclusion.

One central topic of the first set of presentations was environmental skepticism. The study by Jessica Kim and coauthors (Yasemin Soysal, Hector Cebolla Boado and Laura Schimmöller) explored the factors influencing skepticism about climate change on a global scale using data on a sample of 37 countries from the ISSP Environment Module from 2000 to 2020.

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The study analyzed how liberal global cultural forces affect individual skepticism, considering the presence of cultural dissonance, that is a discrepancy between global liberal influences and individual or societal values. The authors introduced the global liberal embeddedness index, which measures the influence of global liberal cultural forces and linkages to global actors and institutions in a country. Results indicated a negative effect of the global liberal embeddedness index on the belief that environmental claims are exaggerated. Interaction effects revealed that this negative effect was absent among those endorsing right-wing ideology. Furthermore, results also showed that in democracies, the level of liberal embeddedness did not impact environmental skepticism, while in authoritarian countries, there was a negative effect. Thus, the study concluded that cultural globalization, particularly liberal forces, play a significant role in reducing skepticism. The level of cultural dissonance was inhibiting skepticism at the national level while contributing to it at the individual level.

The study by Bruno Šimac, Vladimir Ivanović and Tijana Trako Poljak discussed environmental skepticism in six Central European countries (Austria, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Slovakia, and Slovenia) based on data from the 2020 Environment module. Despite shared geopolitical positions and EU membership, differences in historical experiences and socio-economic situations contribute to variations in environmental skepticism levels among these countries. Results indicated that while Central Europeans generally exhibit low levels of environmental skepticism, significant differences existed among the countries surveyed. Factors such as environmental concern, opinion on climate change, economic priorities, and participation in pro-environmental activities emerged as important predictors of skepticism. The presentation concluded by emphasizing the importance of researching environmental skepticism beyond climate change denial and suggested further examination of country-specific predictors to inform pro-environmental action.

The presentation of Joanna Kitsnik and Carola Hommerich compared 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. The study revealed an overall increase in environmental concern in both countries, with Germany showing more urgency in recognizing climate change as a pressing issue across all age groups compared to Japan. However, there was a notable difference in the willingness of younger age groups to make personal sacrifices for the environment: Japanese youth were less inclined, while German youth showed a stronger willingness. Additionally, Germans prioritized individual-level environmental actions more and felt a greater personal responsibility for environmental stewardship compared to Japanese respondents.

Over time, Germany has become more critical of the notion that economic growth is essential for environmental protection, while Japan remains supportive of a growth-driven approach to environmentalism.

The study by Aistė Balžekienė and Audronė Telešienė explored the relationship between climate change risk perception and the perception of local climate change impacts across various countries with differing levels of exposure to risks using data from the 2020 Environmental module. Countries were classified into three groups based on their climate change risk index: high, medium, and low risk. The authors identified groups of respondents with similar perceptions of climate change risks and local impacts using cluster analysis. Interestingly, socio-demographic characteristics were not significant predictors of climate change risk perception across all country groups, except for top-bottom self-placement. The findings revealed that respondents with high risk perception but low perception of local impacts were predominant across all climate change risk country groups, suggesting inadequate perception of climate change exposure, particularly in high-risk countries. Moreover, there were more "under-worried" respondents (low risk, medium local impacts) than those whose climate change risk perceptions aligned with the perception of impact (high risk, high impact), both in high-risk and low-risk countries. This highlights the complexity of climate change risk perception and underscores the importance of understanding local contexts in addressing climate change challenges.

The second set of presentations explored the link between institutional trust and environmental attitudes. The presentation by Jan Urban and Eva Duda explored the relationship between institutional trust and support for pro-environmental policies, drawing on the Campbell paradigm linking environmental attitude and behavior. While institutional trust tends to increase support for certain environmental policies, such as higher taxation, inconsistency is observed regarding support for other policies like subsidies and bans. Using data from the 2020 Environment module for 28 countries, the authors found that institutional trust positively influences environmental policy support, particularly regarding willingness to pay higher prices or taxes and accept cuts in quality of life for environmental protection. The research also examined the choice of suitable policy measures, revealing that individuals tend to support policy solutions that overcome perceived hurdles, with higher levels of institutional trust associated with different policy preferences. Overall, the findings highlighted the importance of both environmental attitude and institutional trust in predicting support for pro-environmental policies, emphasizing the role of perceived behavioral costs in shaping policy preferences.

The study by Sóllilja Bjarnadóttir, Malcolm Fairbrother, Sigrún Ólafsdóttir and Jason Beckfield investigated the relationship between institutional trust, political trust, and climate policy preferences in Iceland. Three climate change policies were examined: increasing taxes on fossil fuels, subsidizing renewable energy, and ensuring a just transition for vulnerable groups. Previous research suggests that political trust positively influences support for taxation on fossil fuels and willingness to sacrifice personal income. The study expands this inquiry to explore the impact of trust in scientists, the fossil fuel industry, and environmental groups on climate policy preferences. Results indicated strong public support for subsidizing renewable energy and just transition policies, with weaker support for taxing fossil fuels. Institutional trust was found to consistently increase support for all three climate policies, while political trust was found to weakly influence support for taxes on fossil fuels. The study concluded that public confidence in climate action reflected beliefs about societal functioning, whereas attitudes towards taxes were more closely tied to views of the state. The study highlighted the importance of political and institutional trust in shaping public preferences for climate policy, with political trust linked to views on taxation and institutional trust associated with broader support for climate policies.

The study by Chinglen Laishram and TK Singh discussed the relationship between environmental insecurity, institutional trust and pro-environmental behavior. It explored whether individuals' experiences of environmental insecurity influenced their inclination towards pro-environmental actions, hypothesizing that the fear or experience of environmental insecurity may lead to a sense of responsibility, prompting sustainable practices. Additionally, it examined the role of institutional trust in mediating this relationship, suggesting that higher institutional trust may correlate with greater willingness to adopt pro-environmental behavior. The study uses the 2020 Environmental module data from 28 societies. Using multivariate statistical models, the authors found a significant impact of environmental insecurity on pro-environmental behavior across societies of varying levels of development. They also identified institutional trust as a moderating factor, indicating that trust in formal institutions influences the relationship between environmental insecurity and pro-environmental behavior.

The third group of presentations discussed issues about equality and social inclusion. The presentation by Marta Moroni and Giulia Dotti Sani aimed to understand this disparity between high levels of environmental concern and low willingness to accept costs to mitigate climate change. The authors hypothesized that this relationship is moderated by climate vulnerabilities and economic vulnerabilities.

Using data from the 2020 Environment module across 27 countries, the study used multilevel regression models to analyze the relationship between environmental concern and willingness to accept costs. The findings suggested that environmental concern positively influences willingness to protect the environment, but this relationship varies across countries. Interestingly, differences in this relationship are more closely associated with economic vulnerabilities than climate vulnerabilities. Countries with high economic vulnerabilities tend to show less increase in willingness to protect the environment with increasing environmental concern compared to those with lower economic vulnerabilities. Overall, the study showed that despite the global concern for the environment, economic factors play a significant role in shaping individuals' willingness to incur costs to address environmental issues.

The presentation by Summer Isaacson examined gender differences in environmental political participation using data from the 2020 Environment module across 28 countries. It aimed to determine if consistent gender disparities exist in various forms of environmental political engagement and whether a country's level of gender equality influences women's engagement more than men's. The findings indicated that women engage more than men in environmental political participation, particularly in individual and non-confrontational forms such as petitions and boycotts. However, confrontational forms like protests show more gender equality, albeit with significant variation across countries. The study suggested that despite progress in gender equality and socio-economic development allowing women to voice environmental grievances, structural gender inequality remains a significant constraint on women's engagement. The study found that in more egalitarian countries, women are more likely to engage in various environmental political activities compared to men.

