

Research Summary: Values as a basis for pro- environmental social change actions

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People pursuing social change directed towards the environment can do so by engaging in different actions such as participating in a public protest, joining community energy initiative, or saving energy at home. Majority of research trying to explain motivation behind different social change actions has focused on the role of social identities (attachment to and identification with significant groups). However, in this paper we propose that individual values play an important role in motivating individuals' choices to engage in different social change actions directed towards the environment.

Research objectives and methods

The main objective of this study was to explore if involvement in different environmental social change actions can be explained based on preferences for different individual values. We proposed typology of

social change actions according to which actions can be differentiated based on different goals they may fulfil. Specifically, we differentiated *self-directed social change* actions such as energy saving in the household or various community level activities from *other-directed* actions such as public protest, civil disobedience activities or consultation with authorities. Both self-directed and other-directed actions address the same ultimate cause (i.e., protecting the environment), and people committed to this cause might perform all of them to some extent.

Broadly speaking, values have been defined as a trans situational goals that serve as a guiding principle in people's lives. Typology of values which we used in this study distinguishes between four value types – biospheric, altruistic, egoistic, and hedonic. Biospheric values emphasise concern for nature and the natural environment, whereas altruistic values reflect concern for social justice and the welfare of others. On the other hand, egoistic values reflect a concern for personal status, power, and influence over others, while hedonic values emphasise enjoyment and positive feelings.

In order to examine how distinct types of

environmental action may be differentially associated with biospheric, altruistic, egoistic, and hedonic values, we surveyed environmental activists who were engaged in events related to the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21).

Results

In order to examine the value basis of different social change strategies, we regressed each of them separately on biospheric, altruistic, egoistic, and hedonic values. On average, values explained about 10% of the variance in each social change action.

We found that self-directed social change actions are uniquely related to biospheric values, which replicates previous findings on household behaviour and extends previous research by investigating the less examined community-based actions. These actions indeed seem to be the most typical expression of biospheric values. Importantly, we found that community-based actions were also uniquely related to altruistic values, which can arguably be attributed to feelings of connectedness to larger issues of social justice.

Association between values and other-directed social change actions showed interesting findings as well. Altruistic values were uniquely related to public protest and civil disobedience, while egoistic values were negatively related to civil disobedience, suggesting that people engage in civil disobedience the more they endorse altruistic values and the less strongly they endorse egoistic values. Lastly, the relationship between values and consultation with authorities (i.e., pro-environmental lobbying) showed that egoistic values

were uniquely and positively associated with action to consult authorities, whereas hedonic values had a small negative relationship with this action. Interestingly, further examination of bivariate correlations between each of the five items of egoistic scale and consultation with authorities showed that two items corresponding to the achievement sub-dimension of egoistic scale were significantly positively correlated with this behaviour (influential: $r = .21, p < .05$; ambitious: $r = .29, p < .01$), whereas the three items corresponding to the power sub-dimension were not (all $ps > .05$).

Summary of results

A summary of the results is provided in Table 1.

Policy relevance of this study

These findings bear some interesting practical implications. Previous studies have shown that any messages and campaigns aimed at environmental or social change should consider people's underlying values to be effective. Our research supports this notion by showing that people's engagement in different types of social change actions is predicted by different values.

Reference

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Table 1. Summary of Results

Goal of social change action	Self-directed change		Other-directed change		
	Individual household	Community -level	Public protest	Civil disobedience	Consulting with authorities
Biospheric	+	+	0	0	0
Altruistic	0	+	+	+	0
Egoistic	0	0	0	-	+
Hedonic	0	0	0	0	-