Psychology of environmentally and socially sustainable behavior

ENS291

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On today’s agenda

• What is Sustainable development?

• Some examples of psychological studies related to sustainable development
Environmentally and socially sustainable behavior

Sustainable development is defined in the Brundtland Report as

“development that meets the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

Environmentally and socially sustainable behavior
Overview – trends in sustainable development


- Lots of statistics and information about international trends related to sustainable development

- Don't memorize all this information
Sustainable development values


- See Table 1 for a definition of such values

- See Table 2 for survey questions used to measure importance attached to such values

- E.g. the value ”Respect for Nature”. That is ”to strive to respect Nature”
Sustainable development values

• E.g. Respect for Nature

• People need only make minor changes to their current consumption out of respect for nature (1)

• ..... 

• People must make major changes to their current consumption out their respect for nature (7)
Sustainable development values

• E.g. Respect for Nature

• Well, - - - do we really measure importance attached to sustainable development values with this kind of questions?

• Comments? Thoughts?

• Results presented by e.g. Leiserowitz, A. A., Kates, R. W., & Parris, T. M. (2006). Sustainability values, attitudes, and behaviors: A review of multinational and global trends. *Annu. Rev. Environ. Resour.*, 31, 413-444. are, partially, based on these kinds of survey questions…. 
Environmentally and socially sustainable behavior

- Idea: You can support sustainable development by choosing product options with different types of environmental or social labels

- E.g.
Fairtrade

• Is the dominant label associated with socially sustainable development

• Fairtrade is about better prices, decent working conditions and fair terms of trade for farmers and workers in developing countries
Environmentally sustainable behavior

• There are a number of product labels…

• E.g.
Wait!

- Are choices of products with these labels really a way to support environmentally and socially sustainable behavior?

- Well, I am into psychology….

- My interest is in why some people are more positive towards products with environmentally friendly or Fairtrade labels

- More positive towards, and willing to pay (WTP) more …
• Can psychology explain differences in attitudes towards, and willingness-to-pay extra (WTP) for

• **products with labels** that presumably are associated with being more **eco-friendly** or more supportive of **social aspects** such as “better prices, decent working conditions and fair terms of trade for farmers and workers in developing countries”

• **That's what this course is all about**
And now

• Some examples of psychological studies related to sustainable development
Some research findings

- “Traits refer to what people are like, values to what people consider important” (this is true by definition)
- A trait is a tendency to show consistent patterns of thought, feelings and actions. E.g. extraversion (warmth, activity, excitement seeking, positive emotions) or on the opposite introversion.
- A value is a desirable guiding principle, e.g. to strive for power (social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources)

Some research findings

- Preference for Fairtrade labelled products have been shown associated with values, but not with traits.

- Especially; **not to strive for** the power value, e.g. social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources, have been found associated with a stronger preference for Fairtrade labelled products.

- So those who more strongly support socially sustainable development seems to strive less for the power value

Some research findings

- I.e., if you have more or less of the traits extraversion or neuroticism doesn’t seem to be associated with preference for Fairtrade-labelled alternatives

- If you strive less for the power value (social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources) you are however more likely to support, and WTP more for, Fairtrade alternatives

Some research findings

Figure 1. The Schwartz’s (1992) value model
Some research findings

Power: Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources

Universalism: Understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection, for the welfare of all people and for nature

Benevolence: Preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact
Some research findings

**Power**: Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources. **NOT positive towards FairTrade/socially sust dev**

**Universalism**: Understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection, for the welfare of all people and for nature. **YES, clearly positive towards FairTrade/soc sust dev**

**Benevolence**: Preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact. **Somewhat positive towards FairTrade/soc sust dev**

Gender and age?

- Research results….
- In some studies - no gender differences, in other studies - **women** have been found more positive towards activities/alternatives associated with sustainable development, e.g. eco-labeled or Fairtrade-labeled alternatives
- Age; mixed results. No clear trend is visible

([www.hv.se](http://www.hv.se)). Available at [http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:hv:diva-5126](http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:hv:diva-5126)
Doomsday Prophecies?

• How vulnerable is nature? There are different opinions on this issue


• In this paper psychology professor Stuart Oskamp paints a picture of acute threats of ecological disasters, and urgent and large changes in our lifestyle is required!

• Does he exaggerate and dramatize?

• (I don´t know)
Positive and negative labels?


• Today product-labelling is entirely voluntary, and actually involves an additional cost.

• As a consequence only positive labels are used. "Choose this product, it is more ”ethical” than the average product."
Positive and negative labels?


• In this study it was found that to avoid negative outcomes was more important than to achieve positive outcomes. That is, negative labels were more ”effective”

• Consequences? Thoughts? Ideas? Comments?
Positive and negative labels?

- In an evolutionary perspective…

- To avoid dangerous animals
Positive and negative labels?

- Or to find advantageous outcomes
Positive and negative labels?

• It was probably more important to avoid negative outcomes

• And, as a consequence, we are ”programmed” to avoid negative outcomes (e.g. close contact with Lions)

• To avoid the negative is more important than to acquire the positive

• And, today almost all labels are ”positive” labels…. Comments?
Religiosity

• Are religious people more positive towards activities associated with sustainable development?

• In a study from USA. Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, Catholics, Jews and non-religious. .... Almost no differences between these groups

• In a study from UK. Being Cristian was weakly, and positively, related to preference for Fairtrade-alternatives

Religiosity

- In the study UK study. If God was viewed as …
Antiques