

Many roads to Rome: Time perspective, environmental knowledge and conservation behavior among Argentines

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Introduction

As shown in various previous studies, a future-oriented time perspective is positively connected with pro-environmental attitudes (Milfont & Gouveia, 2005) and pro-environmental behavior, for example, recycling (Strathman et al., 1994).

In a recent publication, Zimbardo and Boyd (2008) present a new time perspective, which they call the “transcendental future perspective”, involving consideration of future events beyond one’s own life time. The widely accepted definition by the UN (1987) of sustainable development as one that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”, requires exactly this type of time perspective. This leads to the plausible, but so-far untested hypothesis that a transcendental time perspective might be as important for the engagement in conservation behavior as other factors like environmental knowledge (Frick et al, 2004).

Study design

To test this hypothesis we conducted an exploratory study that contrasted two samples of Argentines that we expected to score equally highly in environmental attitudes and behavior, but differ in their approach to such: environmental activists and indigenous people. Whereas we expected the former to base their environmental beliefs and conduct on knowledge rather than on transcendental beliefs, we expected the opposite to be true for the latter.

The internet based survey applied the following scales:

- a short version of the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory, (Zimbardo & Boyd, 2008)
- the New Environmental Paradigm scale (Dunlap et al., 2000)

- a 14-item conductive scale (cf. Hess et al., 1997)
- and a new 36-item environmental knowledge scale (cf. Frick et al., 2004)

Results and discussion

Preliminary simple group comparisons showed that indigenous people displayed an equally high level of concern for the environment and engagement in conservation behaviors as the environmental activists. Regression analyses point to differential predictor patterns in the 2 groups. Indigenous people scored comparatively low on the knowledge scale while exhibiting a higher-than-average consideration of far future events and belief in continuation of one’s life after physical death. The authors conclude that a transcendental time perspective seems to lead people to naturally adhere to sustainability principles, even in absence of environmental knowledge. This novel finding might pave a way for different approaches to environmental education and sensitization.

References

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