

Determinants of Environmental Behavior: The Effect of Social Context

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ABSTRACT

Individual behavior plays a significant role in the use of natural resources and the promulgation of environmental degradation. Environmentally-responsible behavior constitutes practices that generally contribute to environmental well-being. Models that explain why individuals act in an environmentally-responsible way have seen success, but few of them incorporate the effect of the social context of the decision. Conventional environmental policy treats environmental issues separate from social context. There is a growing need for innovative policies that consider social factors that influence individual environmental behavior.

The objective of this thesis is to investigate the causal pathways through which social capital affects environmentally-responsible behavior. By building on previous models, this thesis conceptualizes a path model that explores the impacts of community participation, social trust, and strong relationships on several behaviors such as commuting, boycotting, and behavior on Ozone Action Days. I also propose environmental concern and internal locus as mediating variables between social capital and these environmental behaviors. This path model is tested using a structural equation model that explores the associations. Results show that there are significant relationships between social capital and the willingness to take alternative means of transportation.