



Research paper

Environmental tastes as predictors of environmental opinions and behaviors



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ABSTRACT

We develop a novel way to assess how individuals perceive and utilize their local environment. Specifically, we query local residents in Scotland's Cairngorms National Park regarding their preferences for different characteristics of their environment and examine how these preferences correlate with environmental behaviors and opinions. We identify groupings of preferred characteristics as distinct environmental tastes that, drawing upon Bourdieu's theory of taste, represent general dispositions, preferences, or orientations regarding the environment. We then test whether these tastes are useful for explaining environmental behaviors and opinions.

We introduced this idea previously using survey data drawn from residents of a hyper-arid ecosystem. Here, we seek to establish whether our framework has potentially universal applications generalizable to other socio-ecological settings. We analyze survey data collected from inhabitants of the Cairngorms and, using data reduction methods, identify four distinct environmental tastes. We demonstrate how tastes constitute significant correlates of private sphere environmental behavior, engagement in outdoor activities, opinions about development, perceived economic benefit from the environment, and environmental concerns.

Environmental tastes defined for the Cairngorms are similar to those drawn from previous research and we find several parallels between the two different settings in the associations between tastes and opinions and behavior. There are similarities in the way individuals with certain profiles of environmental tastes are more inclined to have certain opinions and to engage in certain activities. We suggest that tastes can be elucidating for understanding diverse preferences for environmental characteristics and their broader implications for how humans interact with the landscape.

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1. Introduction

Sociological and psychological literature has proposed various theories to explain behaviors that impact the environment. These theories articulate associations between various constructs such as values, attitudes, concerns, awareness, and socio-demographic characteristics, which shape pro-environmental behavior (Barr, 2007; Olli, Grendstad, & Wollebaek, 2001; Steg & Vlek, 2009). Although we see differences between these theories in the dimensions they emphasize and in their depictions of the processes that lead to engagement in pro-environmental behaviors, the general

picture that emerges is that socio-psychological factors, such as values and beliefs, have been more successful than socio-demographic factors in predicting pro-environmental behaviors (Boldero, 1995; de Groot & Steg, 2008; Guagnano, Stern, & Dietz, 1995). For example, the value-belief-norm theory (Stern, 2000) has shown how environmental behaviors stem from holding particular personal values emphasizing certain perceptions of altruism and care for other humans, plants, and animals. While values cannot and should not be completely separated from socio-demographic factors (which may underlie values systems, as noted above), they are often shown to be more closely associated to behaviors and opinions.

In this research we continue this line of inquiry by deriving and testing a new construct that measures the way individuals perceive the environment, which we call "environmental tastes". We explore whether this construct can shed new light on the factors

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that influence environmentally significant behavior and opinions. We developed this concept in previous research, and apply it here to an entirely new socio-ecological setting. We reason that if analogous relationships are established elsewhere, then environmental tastes may have universal applicability.

1.1. Environmental tastes and landscape preferences

We identify **environmental tastes** as clusters of orientations toward the environment. We define environmental tastes by querying people regarding their preferences for a specific set of biological, physical and climatic components of the landscape (e.g. mountains, rain, trees, birds; details provided in methods section). In developing this notion, we rely on Bourdieu's theory of taste (Bourdieu, 1984) to claim that environmental tastes are embedded in lifestyle and consumption preferences that would have an impact on environmental behavior. Bourdieu's (1984) theory of taste posits that tastes (e.g. cultural, ethical, or environmental preferences) are socially constructed, cultivated through socialization, and used to demarcate social groups in a hierarchical way that distinguishes "legitimate" from "illegitimate" norms, values, and preferences. Because tastes are cultivated through socialization, they are often taken for granted or interpreted as innate, individualistic choices of the human intellect. However, Bourdieu argues that in fact tastes are acquired dispositions that individuals use to evaluate and differentiate things in the social world (Lizardo, 2013). These dispositions produce tastes, which are embedded in lifestyles and in turn shape behavior.

The link between tastes, lifestyles and behavior has been applied in diverse ways to environmental research (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Horton, 2003). In the environmental context, tastes have been shown to reflect dispositions toward nature, sustainability, preservation, landscapes, daily consumption practices, etc. Further, environmental tastes have been posited to form a set of dispositions that generate perceptions and practices (Crossley, 2003; Haluzá-DeLay, 2008; Sela-Sheffy, 2011). These practices are embedded in individuals' lifestyles and are therefore conditioned by particular social contexts. For example, Carfagna et al. (2014) report a class of ethical consumers characterized by a high cultural capital who exhibit an eco-habitus (i.e. environmental orientation) that encourages environmental awareness and sustainability principles. To summarize, in the environmental field, tastes may shape attitudes and behavior in realms such as reflexivity about daily practices, seeking time in nature, or conscious effort to live environmentally.

In this research, we identify and measure environmental taste variables and analyze their relationship to environmental behaviors and opinions. As such, we suggest our research is similar in several ways to the study of landscape preferences because preferences for the landscape are among the taste indicators that we employ and because landscape preferences are often studied with regard to their interaction with environmental opinions and behaviors (e.g. DeLucio & Múgica, 1994; Larsen & Harlan, 2006; Múgica & De Lucio, 1996; Sevenant & Antrop, 2010). One difference between this literature and the research presented here, however, is that most, if not all, of the landscape preference literature focuses on the determinants of landscape preferences and not the reverse relationship, as we examine in this work, whether landscape preferences (or, in our case, environmental tastes) can be used as possible predictors of environmental behaviors and opinions (e.g. Oreg & Katz-Gerro, 2006; Takahashi & Selfa, 2015).

Landscape is often defined as the product of the interaction between a biophysical space and the human activity occurring within that space (Council of Europe, 2000; Naveh, 2000, 2001; Naveh & Lieberman, 1994). Landscape is perceived and interpreted by the observer within particular contexts, defined

by culture, expectations, needs and other variables (Arriaza, Cañas-Ortega, Cañas-Madueño, & Ruiz-Aviles, 2004; Barroso, Pinto-Correia, Ramos, Surová, & Menezes, 2012; Egoz, Bowring, & Perkins, 2001; Gobster, Nassauer, Daniel, & Fry, 2007). Landscape preferences have been assessed using two paradigms, one which considers landscape beauty to be inherent in its physical properties (i.e. the objectivist paradigm), and the other focusing on the subject observing the landscape (i.e. the subjectivist paradigm; Daniel, 2001; Dramstad, Tveit, Fjellstad, & Fry, 2006; Lothian, 1999). Research extending from these approaches addresses the question of whether there is a general consensus regarding what constitutes aesthetic beauty (Kalivoda, Vojar, Skřivanová, & Zahradník, 2014; Stamps, 1997; Ulrich, 1986), or whether landscape aesthetics differ widely according to cultural, social and demographic variables, including nationality, age, residential profile, religion and other characteristics (Buijs, Elands, & Langers, 2009; Duncan, 1973; Gee & Burkhard, 2010; Natori & Chenoweth, 2008; Zube & Pitt, 1981). Still other work identifies diversity in landscape preferences, but finds factors other than socio-demographic variables to be stronger correlates with landscape preferences, such as knowledge of the landscape and on-site experiences (Brush, Chenoweth, & Barman, 2000; Múgica & De Lucio, 1996) or educational background (subject matter, not necessarily years of study; Dramstad et al., 2006; Zheng, Zhang, & Chen, 2011). On the other hand, Sevenant and Antrop (2010), who defined the latent characteristics of landscapes that are preferred or not preferred, and then tested whether there were distinct preferences to these latent characteristics based on socio-demographic variables, found that latent characteristics were correlated with both socio-demographic variables (including age and education level) and behaviors and attitudes.

Several researchers have studied whether environmental values, activities and/or opinions might explain landscape preferences. For instance, DeLucio and Múgica (1994) and Múgica and De Lucio (1996) investigated whether activities and opinions of visitors to national parks in Spain can be used to determine their landscape preferences. In their first study, they found that landscape preferences were based on the activities in which visitors intended to engage and on the decisions they had made regarding which parks to visit (e.g. they preferred the landscapes for which the parks were known; DeLucio & Múgica, 1994). In their second study, they investigated the determinants of landscape preferences of park visitors to the Doñana National Park, and found that visitors who had acquired knowledge about the park and those with stronger environmental opinions more strongly preferred park landscapes than those with less knowledge or more moderate environmental opinions.

Larsen and Harlan (2006), in their study of private yards in a suburban landscape, investigated the relationship between landscape preferences and behaviors, as expressed by how residents maintain their front and back yards. They concluded that the way residents maintained their yards (i.e. behavior) reflected their landscape preferences, although, recalling earlier work by Duncan (1973), they also showed that both behavior and preference are at least partially determined by social class. On the other hand, they also found that demographic variables did not correlate significantly with landscape preferences. Larson, Cook, Strawhacker, and Hall (2010) were able to explain residential landscaping decisions through interactions among environmental values, land cover and neighborhood effects.

While the directionality of the relationship between tastes (among them landscape preferences) and behavior could be further tested in various domains, there is general agreement in social psychological research on environmental issues that attitudes precede behavior (e.g. Oreg & Katz-Gerro, 2006; Takahashi & Selfa, 2015).

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