



## Case study

# Are sport tourists of an environmental mindset to drive the green? The case of golfers

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## ABSTRACT

This study makes several unique contributions to the fields of environmental psychology, sport tourism and environmental management programmes. Firstly, it evaluates golfers' environmental worldviews using the New Environmental Paradigm (NEP) attitudinal-measurement scale. Data were drawn from a meta-analysis and survey ( $n > 275$ ) in Wales, UK. Secondly, the five-step Transtheoretical model of change is applied to the average NEP score to develop a tipping point. Thirdly, the study transforms average NEP scores into a percentage and links them to a behavioural willingness to change value (70%). Interestingly, the study yielded a golfers' NEP score of 58% that did not vary with demographics. The methodology is also applied to 32 similar studies to generate NEP percentages and compare them against the NEP percentage score of willingness to change. Finally, the golfers' NEP percentage value is visually presented on a behaviour change thermostat as a simple means to engage stakeholders' discussion on this topic.

## 1. Introduction

It is increasingly clear that humankind is not living in balance within the Earth's natural limits. In fact, research demonstrates that we are consuming the Earth's resources at ever more unsustainable rates. For example, 1.5 Earths are required to meet the demands humanity currently makes on nature (World Wildlife Fund, 2014). As a result, we are facing increasingly more serious environmental issues, such as, climate change and the overall costs and risks of this are estimated to be equivalent to losing at least 5% of global GDP each year (Stern Review, 2006).

What is more, human activities are now so influential and overpowering that they are rapidly pushing the Earth into a less biologically diverse, less forested, much warmer, wetter and stormier state and the visible fact of global change represents a profound shift in the human and nature relationship (Steffen, Crutzen, & McNeill, 2007, p. 614). Moreover, human behaviour patterns have a large influence on the overall quality of the environment (Steg & Vlek, 2009, p. 309) and the functioning of the Planet's ecosystems (Hirsch, 2010) that we depend upon for our survival.

Thus, it is clear that we need to encourage much more pro-environmental behaviour. This can be defined as the extent in which an individual, group or culture is aware of environmental concerns and

supports efforts and/or indicates a personal willingness to contribute to their solution (Dunlap & Jones, 2002). It also refers to "behaviour that harms the environment as little as possible, or even benefits the environment" (Steg & Vlek, 2009, p. 309). However, to do that we first need to understand better, why people treat the environment as they do (Glasman & Albarracin, 2006). Investigating people and cultures' environmental worldviews is a means to do that.

A case in point is golf and the focus of this study for the following reasons. Golf is subject to strategic green pressures to address its environmental impacts (Minoli & Smith, 2011). Environmental management programmes (EMPs) have been developed so that all businesses including golf clubs can improve their environmental performance. However, there has been limited uptake of EMPs in golf facilities. Surprisingly there is very limited research, if any, on the reasons for this (Minoli & Smith, 2011).

So, what explains the current low level of implementation of EMPs in golf clubs? This situation in part may well be due to the prevailing environmental worldviews and attitudes of golfers. It must be kept in mind that golfers are key stakeholders in golf clubs. For example, golf club members often sit on management committees concerned with the day-to-day management of the golf course and clubhouse. Golfers as well vote on management decisions in annual general meetings. Golfers, consequently influence management decisions on the

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maintenance and presentation of the golf course including the playing and non-playing areas therein. Moreover, EMPs often fail owing to the lack of assessment of the beliefs, attitudes and worldviews of stakeholders (Wilhelm-Richmann, Cowling, & Difford, 2014, p. 206). Consequently, an insightful understanding of golfers' attitudes on the environment is essential to enable conservation practitioners to understand better the barriers to implementing EMPs (p. 207). It is also much needed to facilitate the design and implementation of appropriate and cost-effective intervention types to increase the level of implementation of EMPs in golf clubs and resorts, in order to progress more responsible and sustainable golf.

Thus, the study sought to assess golfers' environmental worldviews using the New Environmental Paradigm (NEP) attitudinal-measurement scale (explained below). The study also sought to calculate a NEP score for golfers and to determine if this value varied in relation to demographics i.e. gender, age, education and time playing the sport. The study also wanted to benchmark golfers' NEP scores against other NEP scores. In addition, the study sought to calculate what NEP score would be required to support pro-environmental behaviour, such as, the implementation of EMPs in golf clubs based on the Transtheoretical model of change.

Importantly the results of a survey found golfers had a NEP score of 58%. NEP scores of 70% are required to initiate change management. This shows that golfers have limited awareness on environmental issues and there is significant opposition to change management in golf clubs. Strong interventions are thus required from golf's stakeholders to stimulate wider uptake of EMPs in golf clubs. The study's findings should be of value to all organisations involved in the implementation of EMPs in favour of sustainable sport, tourism and leisure. The paper continues with the study's literature review, methods, results and discussion.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Environmental worldviews

Environmental worldviews are frameworks of considered opinion that inform our understanding and support of reality (Hedlund-de Witt, 2012; Hedlund-de Witt, de Boer, & Boersema, 2014). They are critically important, as they greatly influence people's perceptions of human–environment and human-economic relationships that inform environmental attitudes for more sustainable lifestyles (Hedlund-de Witt, 2012, pp. 74–75). Moreover, they shape how individuals perceive environmental problems and influence their willingness to partake of as well as support political efforts in their solution (Gifford, 2011; Hedlund-de Witt, 2012; Kempton, Boster, & Hartley, 1995).

There are two opposing worldviews (e.g. Dunlap & Jones, 2002). First, the one that tends to see the solution to ecological issues in humanity recognising its place in the larger natural order. Conversely, the second viewpoint generally understands the solution to be through the means of science and technology. Cases in point are Fairtrade and organic products, as they are associated with our changing views and feelings on fair living wages for workers and organic farming that favour natural fertilisers, respectively (Hedlund-de Witt, 2012). Therefore, to improve our understanding of pro-environmental behaviour and intentions and sustainable lifestyles, it is important to provide an insight into worldviews and how they function and change in society (De Vries & Petersen, 2009; Hedlund-de Witt, 2012; Hulme, 2009). One factor that influences the worldviews of people is their environmental attitudes (Schwenk & Moser, 2009).

### 2.2. Environmental attitudes

Environmental attitudes refer to a person, group or cultures enduring positive or negative feeling toward some other person, object or issue (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2012, p. 252). They are important in view of the fact that environmental problems stem in part from the

prevailing attitudes that exist within our society (e.g. Dunlap & Van Liere, 1978). Furthermore, environmental attitudes act as 'guiding principles in life' (Stern, Dietz, Kalof, & Guagnano, 1995; Stern, Dietz, & Kalof, 1993), as they influence how we make judgements on the severity of environmental problems and how we choose between ideas, strategies and schemes to overcome them, or chose not to act all (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1982; Lundmark, 2007; Thompson, Ellis, & Wildavsky, 1990).

However, pro-environmental behaviour does not solely rely upon environmental attitudes (e.g. Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2012). Environmental attitudes and pro-environmental behaviour are separate and in general are not highly interrelated. Settings and factors outside the individual have far more influence on what people actually do in practice (e.g. Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2012). What is more, beliefs, knowledge or emotions are the drivers of environmental attitudes (Heberlein, 2012a, p. 583). In turn, a person's beliefs are dependent on the information, knowledge and understanding a person has about another individual, thing or topic (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2012; Newhouse, 1991). Moreover, these factors are important agents of change in modifying environmental attitudes for pro-environmental behaviour.

Even so, environmental attitudes are important, as we believe in them and find them useful for understanding the behaviour of others (Heberlein, 2012b). Moreover, they are seen as an important predicting variable within a persons' planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). They also fundamentally shape the kinds of alternatives and policies available for social change (Heberlein, 2012a). Further, environmental attitudes are useful for environmental managers, non-governmental organisations and government. This is because they provide essential information about public beliefs that are important for gaining support in setting goals necessary to frame environmental policies, laws, regulations and standards.

Furthermore, it is essential that we determine the environmental attitudes of an individual, group or culture (Heberlein, 2012b). Given that, studying cultures have been identified as one approach for overcoming local and global environmental problems (Vlek & Steg, 2007). This is because cultures have common values and beliefs that develop shared experiences, social interaction, and joint confirmation and support among its members (Trendafilova, 2011, p. 2). As a result, each culture becomes a potentially important lever for shaping behaviour and nurturing group efforts among those who identify with that specific culture (p. 2).

### 2.3. Golf

Golf is built upon certain customs and behaviour and for that reason it can be seen as a particular culture (Minoli, Goode, & Smith, 2015, p. 207). Specifically, golf's etiquette and 'care of the course', as laid out in the Rules of Golf, dictates the spirit in which the sport is played and therefore may well position golf apart from other sports (Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews [R&A], 2016a). In addition, golf is self-governing, as golfers depend upon their trustworthy observance to the Rules to enjoy the sport. Golf's inbuilt qualities, that is to say, trust, consideration, fairness and acceptable behaviour are also supportive to the principles of sustainable development. Golf as well is played in and closely associated with a clean, healthy and natural environment. Thus, golf is conceivably one of the best-placed sports to be expected to engage, exemplify and champion pro-environmental behaviour.

Indeed, golf courses subject to how they are designed, constructed and managed have a range of environmental issues concerning the conservation and protection of natural habitat for wildlife and biodiversity and the prudent use of chemicals, fertilisers, water and energy (e.g. Minoli & Smith, 2011, pp. 872–873). Moreover, golf courses can provide essential green urban infrastructure (European Commission, 2015; European Environment Agency, 2011) that is important for flora and fauna and our general health and well-being (e.g. Kishimoto et al.,

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