

DETERMINANTS OF ORIENTATION TO NATURE PROTECTION: SOME INFERENCES FROM ESTONIAN SOCIETY

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The human being is the key to successful nature conservation, but also the beneficiary of the anthropocentric preservation endeavours. Preventing, mitigating and adapting to changes in the natural environment require a comprehensive understanding of the role of human in the integrated ecological system governance. This paper aims at defining the key societal determinants of human perception of the need for nature protection and the related individual behaviour. This paper presents theoretical propositions that could predict the Estonians orientation to nature protection.

We can distinguish three main categories of drivers that influence the public salience of nature protection and related behaviour in Estonia (Figure 1).

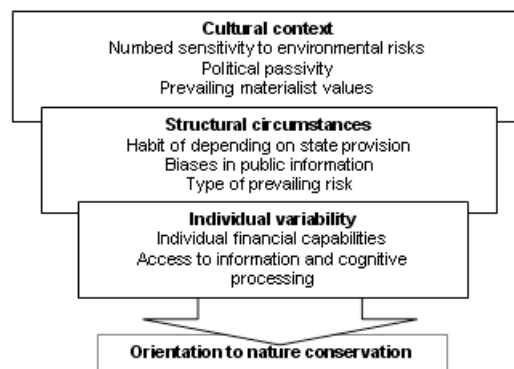


Figure 1. Main triggers of public salience of nature protection.

First, we need to consider the normative circumstances that have encouraged attitudes to nature. Deeply rooted societal norms, but also destabilising historical experiences have led to devaluation of individual well-being, let alone the natural surroundings framing our daily activities. Furthermore, as characteristic to the Eastern European transitional societies, we can see the dominance of materialist values that elicit less likely investments in environmental safety. When it comes to acting upon the convictions of nature protection and related political reactions, ingrained traditions of political passivity are characteristic of post-soviet societies.

Second, the structural circumstances constrain or facilitate the alertness to nature conservation ideas. The available representations of nature, notions of its adaptability to anthropogenic pressures create the societally prevailing sense of nature. For example, depictions of controversial, complex and cumulatively effective water ecosystem balances are less likely understood by public when compared to the portrayal of concrete threats to water ecosystem-dependent communities' livelihoods. The historical legacies of state nature protection programmes diffuse the sense of moral as well as economic responsibility for consuming natural goods.

Third, we must account for the individual variability in the financial capacities for natural resource users' contributions. Finally, the individual processing of nature conservation messages, their anchoring to old beliefs, optimistic biases, appeal to catastrophic events rather than the cumulative day-to-day natural degradation due to human behaviour should be considered as determinants of Estonians alignment to nature conservation ideas.

This paper endeavours to contribute to the understanding of politico-societal and economical determinants of the success of nature protection.

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