

Nation's 'personality' influences its environmental stewardship, shows new study

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Countries with higher levels of compassion and openness score better when it comes to environmental sustainability, says research from the University of Toronto.

A new study by Jacob Hirsh, an Assistant Professor of Organizational Behaviour & Human Resource Management at the University of Toronto Mississauga's Institute for Management & Innovation, who is cross-appointed to UofT's Rotman School of Management, demonstrates that a country's personality profile can predict its [environmental sustainability](#) records.

While Prof. Hirsh's previous work has looked at how personality traits predict an individual's attitudes about the environment, this latest study takes the research to another level, examining how those traits play out across whole nations.

"We used to think that personality only mattered for individual outcomes," says Prof. Hirsh, "but we're finding that population differences in personality characteristics have many large-scale consequences".

The new study examined nation-level personality traits from a database of over 12,000 people in 51 [countries](#). National personality differences, reflecting average trait profiles of a country's citizens, were used to predict scores on the Environmental Performance Index (EPI). The EPI, developed at Yale and Columbia Universities, ranks countries across 22

environmental indicators, including Co2 emission levels, use of renewable energy, and ecosystem management.

Higher scores on the EPI, reflecting more environmentally sustainable practices, were positively correlated with national levels of two personality traits: Agreeableness, which reflects empathy and [compassion](#), and Openness, which reflects cognitive flexibility and aesthetic appreciation. The same relationships were observed even when controlling for national differences in wealth, education, and population size.

These results highlight the psychological factors that can shape a nation's environmental policies, says Prof. Hirsh. "Not only can a person's attitudes about the environment be predicted from his or her personality traits, but the environmental practices of entire nations can be predicted from the personality profiles of their citizens".

The paper was published in a recent issue of the *Journal of Environmental Psychology*.

Provided by University of Toronto

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