

Women and people with offspring are more prepared to pay for environmental improvements

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When it comes to making public decisions with implications for the environment, it is important to bear in mind population preferences. For this purpose, one of the methodologies that has been spreading most worldwide in recent years involves the so-called discrete choice experiments. In them economic analysis is used to obtain a monetary valuation of people's preferences about the state of the environment. Nevertheless, Dr David Hoyos and Dr Petr Mariel of the UPV/EHU have incorporated into this analysis information gathered from a scale used in psychology about the environmental attitudes of the people surveyed. That way, they have been able to relate the sociodemographic characteristics of the individuals to their environmental preferences.

The economic valuation of natural resources seeks to express in monetary terms the value of the goods and services that the environment provides. For this, economists use discrete choice experiments in which the people surveyed are given a set of options and are asked to choose the one that maximises their well-being. Each alternative proposed in the survey has an associated cost that can be used to translate the preferences of the surveyees into monetary terms. Basically, it is about measuring, in euros, the social well-being associated with a particular environmental change. All this is very useful in the sphere of social choices because political players can obtain valuable qualitative and quantitative information about what citizens are demanding and how much. Since these preferences are also obtained in monetary terms, this information

can be incorporated into a standard "cost-benefit" [economic analysis](#). In other words, it is possible to compare within the same measurement unit, in money, what cost and what benefit an environmental policy may offer society.

Dr David Hoyos and Dr Petr Maril of the UPV/EHU's Department of Applied Economics III have used this model in various locations. One of the locations analysed is the protected Garate-Santa Barbara area between the Basque coastal towns of Zarautz and Getaria. In the study conducted in this area, the surveyees were asked to choose between the revival of the autochthonous woodland and the expansion of the vineyards in the area in order to measure the impact that these different land uses have on the well-being of the people. In other words, they were asked in this case to choose between promoting [environmental values](#) as opposed to more commercial uses of the land. On the basis of the responses given by the surveyees, it was concluded that "the promotion of environmental values in the area constituted a social benefit estimated between 57 and 265 million euros per year," explained Hoyos. What is more, in the study it was possible to see that greater social benefit was achieved when environmental values were promoted over commercial exploitation.

Women, people with offspring and nature lovers

The researchers wanted to go further by taking an in-depth look at the results of this study. Having assessed people's preferences economically, they studied the influence exerted by the environmental attitudes of those people when it comes to reflecting their preferences. In other words, they endeavoured to explain why being prepared to pay for environmental improvements varies between some individuals and others. For this purpose they incorporated into the previous model attitudinal environmental information about the surveyees (in relation, for example, to recycling, love of nature, etc.), in order to understand in

a more detailed way, why they choose certain options over others. Information gathered from a scale used in psychology was used about the environmental attitudes of the surveyees to classify these people.

By way of conclusion, it should be highlighted that being prepared to pay for environmental improvements is ranked higher in those people who believe it is necessary to take action to preserve the environment. But when analysing the [sociodemographic characteristics](#) of these people, the conclusion was reached that the willingness to pay more is greater in women than in men; it is greater in people with offspring compared with those who do not have offspring; and it is greater the keener the person is to be in contact with nature.

Thanks to this new application, apart from managing a natural space while taking people's preferences into consideration, it is possible to design more efficient public policies since, as Hoyos explained, "the public institutions have more detailed information about how these preferences are distributed among the population." What is more, once the population has been characterised, more specific environmental policies can be designed. "For example," he explained, "we can understand that the profile of a man without offspring and who is not a nature lover is a social profile that needs more specific awareness building."

More information: D. Hoyos, P. Mariel, S. Hess. 'Incorporating environmental attitudes in discrete choice models: an exploration of the utility of the awareness of consequences scale'. *Science of the Total Environment* (2014); in press., - 0048-9697

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