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Predictors of Community Openness to Climate Change Initiatives

Abstract

Climate change is an important topic for researchers and the public. Recently, both private and government organizations have implemented new policies to improve their sustainability in the face of climate change (e.g., Burch, 2010). In line with these changes, "green organizations" have received significant attention in the literature (e.g., Blazovich, Smith, & Smith, 2013). This body of research suggests that perceptions and characteristics of stakeholders (e.g., employees, investors, citizens) influence the effectiveness of sustainable organizational policies, as well as the ability of organizations and stakeholders to adapt to climate change (e.g., Adger et al., 2013). At the same time, the literature suggests that many individuals do not fully understand the meaning of climate change, or its widespread effects (Apata et al., 2009; Buys et al., , 2012). Further, previous research supports the notion that culture influences human responses to climate change (e.g., Adger et al., 2013). More specifically, individuals' perceptions of their community and the society they live in influences how they feel and adapt to the effects of climate change. Research suggests community resources and characteristics (e.g., attachment, resilience) and individual characteristics (e.g., gender, education level, income) may influence the community/organization's overall ability to respond and adapt to climate change, and any associated sustainability policies (Davidson et al., 2003). The purpose of the current study was to examine factors that predict community members openness to climate change adaptation policies in their communities. Online survey data was collected from 7000 residents, 18 years and older, of rural communities. Regression analyses indicate that individuals who have a better understanding of climate change (i.e., meaning of climate change, effects of climate change) and feel more attached to their community are more likely to believe something can be done to address climate change in their community and more willing to pay higher taxes in an effort to do so. In addition, regression analyses indicate that individuals who believe their community is resilient are more likely to be willing to reduce the level of services in their community in an effort to address climate change concerns. Overall, these results suggest that both understanding climate change and community perceptions are likely to increase willingness to support climate change initiatives.

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