

## **Regional Disparities in Environmental Attitudes: The Role of Social Capital Italy**

Production and consumption have resulted in significant negative environmental impacts, leading to widespread public intervention through laws, regulations, and policies designed to mitigate these effects. Market-based interventions, such as a carbon tax, aim to internalise the external social costs and hold economic actors accountable for their actions. However, as Merz et al. (2023) highlight, policy interventions aimed at mitigating environmental problems often address the symptoms but fail to resolve the root causes, as they do not effectively modify maladaptive behaviours.

The literature on environmental concern and behaviour suggests that these are the result of a complex interplay of individual factors, contextual factors, and cultural and social-related factors (Baiardi, 2023). Social norms and social capital can play a critical role in mitigating environmental externalities by promoting virtuous behaviour (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002; Perry et al., 2021). Empirical evidence demonstrates that different cultures and varying levels of social capital influence environmental concern and behaviour (Pretty & Ward, 2001; Adger, 2003; Eisler et al., 2003; Zheng & Yoshino, 2003; Oreg & Katz-Gerro, 2006; Gifford & Nilsson, 2014; van der Linden, 2015; Atshan et al., 2020; Argentiero et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2024).

Recent research has highlighted the need for further exploration of the role of social capital in influencing environmental concern and behaviour (Atshan et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2024). For instance, Atshan et al. (2020) studied the mechanisms through which community participation, social trust, and strong ties influence environmentally responsible behaviour (ERB) in an urban context. Their findings indicate that social capital, particularly general trust, significantly affects environmental engagement.

The study aims to analyse the drivers of environmental concern and behaviour in Italian regions, with a specific focus on differences in social capital. The analysis will particularly emphasise the regional disparities Italy, exploring how their unique social and cultural contexts influence environmental attitudes and actions. The research aims to explore whether: H1) Higher levels of social capital are positively associated with environmentally responsible behaviour (ERB); H2) The effect of social capital on ERB varies significantly between regions due to differences in cultural and economic contexts; H3) Regional disparities in economic development, cultural norms and social capital lead to significant differences in environmental engagement.

To address these hypotheses, the study investigates the results of an ad hoc survey administered to a representative sample of Italian regions, stratified by age and gender. The findings suggest that the results partially confirm the hypotheses.

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