methaodos.revista de ciencias sociales (2024) 12(1) m241201a01

Global vocabulary and regional divides: representations of the environmental crisis of young adults in Ireland and Uruguay

Vocabulario global y divisiones regionales: representaciones de la crisis medioambiental de jóvenes adultos en Irlanda y Uruguay

Victoria Gómez-Márquez | vgomez@um.edu.uy
University of Montevideo, Uruguay

10.17502/mrcs.v12i1.755

Received: 01-02-2024
Accepted: 26-03-2024

Abstract

A triple environmental crisis marks the current century: the climate, biodiversity and pollution emergencies that challenge societies around the world and require global dialogue. Consequently, it seems worth assessing across international strata, whether young adults living in different regions would share social representations of the environmental crisis. Built on findings from 16 focus group discussions held in Ireland and Uruguay, comprising 109 participants, the objective of this article is to uncover and compare between countries: which environmental issues remain crucial for young citizens of diverse backgrounds and affiliations; how coincidental issues of concern are articulated across countries; and how structural factors are perceived as key to an environmentally unsustainable system. Let alone the case of Climate Change, the main findings point to shared topics of concern, such as Waste Generation and Disposal or Food Production and Consumption, with contrasting social representations of them between the two regions, which shed light on how environmental risk is socially built in dialogue with the context despite global discursive trends, in a highly mediatized and glocal era. Unlike university students focused studies, the paper offers a qualitative approach to the perceptions of young adults of diverse backgrounds in both countries.

Keywords: climate change; cross-national study; environmental risk; food; waste.

Resumen

Una triple crisis ambiental marca el siglo actual: las emergencias climáticas, de biodiversidad y de contaminación desafían a las sociedades de todo el mundo y requieren un diálogo global. En consecuencia, parece valioso evaluar a través de estratos internacionales si los adultos jóvenes que viven en diferentes regiones comparten representaciones sociales de la crisis ambiental. Basado en hallazgos de 16 grupos de discusión realizados en Irlanda y Uruguay, con un total de 109 participantes, el objetivo principal de este artículo es descubrir y comparar entre países: cuáles son los problemas ambientales que siguen siendo cruciales para los jóvenes ciudadanos de diversos orígenes y afiliaciones; cómo se articulan las preocupaciones ambientales coincidentes en cada país; y cómo se perciben los factores estructurales que estarían siendo la clave de un sistema ambientalmente insostenible. Dejando aparte el caso del cambio climático, los principales hallazgos apuntan a temas compartidos de preocupación, como la generación y disposición de residuos o la producción y el consumo de alimentos, con representaciones sociales contrastantes de sus significados entre las dos regiones, lo que arroja luz sobre cómo el riesgo ambiental se construye socialmente en diálogo con el contexto a pesar de las tendencias discursivas globales, en una era altamente mediatizada y glocal. A diferencia de los estudios centrados en estudiantes universitarios, el artículo ofrece un enfoque cualitativo sobre las percepciones de adultos jóvenes de diversos perfiles en ambos países.

Palabras clave: *cambio climático, estudio internacional, riesgo ambiental, alimentos, basura.*

Summary

How to cite this work

Gómez-Márquez, V. (2024). Global vocabulary and regional divides: representations of the environmental crisis of young adults in Ireland and Uruguay. *methaodos.revista de ciencias sociales*, *12*(1), m241201a01. https://doi.org/10.17502/mrcs.v12i1.755

1. Introduction

A triple environmental crisis marks the current century: the climate, biodiversity and pollution emergencies that challenge societies around the world (United Nations Environment Programme, 2021). Despite these broad definitions, "the environment" itself and the eco-systemic damages could be abstract, ever changing, and therefore difficult to apprehend or objectify in a comparable way across countries and regions. This underscores the significance of the social construction of environmental risk (Urry, 2013), as "social constructions and definitions based upon corresponding relations of definition" (Beck, 2009, p. 30). In Urlich Beck's terms: "The concept of risk and risk society bring together what it seems to be mutually exclusive: society and nature, social science and material science, the discoursive construction of risk and physical threats" (Beck, 2009, p. 27). An extensive array of scholarly investigations posits that the perception of risk exerts a discernible impact on garnering public support and fostering public participation in endeavors related to climate change mitigation (i.e. Hagen *et al.*, 2016). However, quantitative measures of environmental concern are insufficient as higher awareness of environmental threats might relate to lower risk perception of it due to a process of risk normalization (Parkhill *et al.*, 2010; Luís *et al.*, 2018) and the affective dimension involved in environmental risk (Salas Reyes *et al.*, 2021) cannot be captured through those methods. In a scenario where availability of scientific data on the severity and imminence of the environmental crisis fails to generate widespread mobilization or bold support for green policies, it becomes crucial to investigate how citizens perceive and articulate environmental risk.

The socio-environmental conflicts mapped by the Environmental Justice Atlas or the Environmental Performance Index give some clues about potential concern divides between countries within the global diagnosis of a triple environmental crisis. However, the contemporary mediated access to many geographically distant "environments" discourages the assumption that only the direct exposure to threats or to the measures taken to face them matters. In times of digitally accelerated cultural globalization (Roudometof, 2005), the environment under threat increases in scope when we can become spectators from across all corners of the planet, and the global popularity of eco-celebrities helps in targeting mainstream audiences worldwide. Therefore, a shared awareness of common planetary challenges such as the environmental crisis is facilitated by a network society (Castells, 1996) leading to an emerging 'sense of planet' (Heise, 2008), which might compete with regional versions of environmentalism (Guha & Martínez Alier, 1997) and culturally shaped life goals (Rahman & Luomala, 2021).

With glocality as a feature of the current times, young adults have been particularly inscribed in the digital communication dynamics and in a diversity of cultures at the local, national, and international levels of a globalised world (Roudometof, 2005). Furthermore, they are usually associated to environmental activism and the embracing of a green culture, without necessarily considering the inequalities and geopolitical divides that might affect levels of environmental literacy (Brereton, 2018). At the local level, for instance, it might matters that Ireland and Uruguay have in common the sustainability challenges of a robust agricultural economy and culture, while also pertaining to supranational bodies (European Union, Mercosur) with diverse stress in green regional policies. Situated in the Global North and the Global South respectively, both countries share the feature of a high penetration of internet, which would facilitate the globalisation of media consumption and the access to other mediatised environments. Keeping in mind their varying historical patterns of regional environmentalism (Guha & Martínez Alier, 1997), one could argue that Uruguay, located on the periphery of the world system, could offer a very different picture than Ireland, a country located in the global core region. But it could also be construed that globalized drivers and other factors allow for shared environmental perceptions (Pong & Tam, 2023). As researchers on this topic argue, "cross-national and cross-cultural comparisons are ideal for highlighting and explaining the interplay between national and transnational aspects" (Schäfer *et al.*, 2016, p. 13).

Consequently, it seems worth assessing across international strata, whether young adults living in different regions would share social representations of the environmental crisis. Built on findings from focus group discussions held in Ireland and Uruguay, the goal of this article is to uncover and compare between countries: a) which issues remain crucial for young citizens of diverse background and affiliations; b) how coincidental issues of concern are articulated in each country; and c) how structural factors are perceived as key to an environmentally unsustainable system.

Along with the comparative value, the inclusive and qualitative approach of the study enables rich accounts of a diversity of citizens voices potentially involved in the response to the environmental crisis at place. On

the one hand, the novelty of this project relies on the special emphasis on covering a diverse range of educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. Environmental awareness and behaviour of young adults have been widely explored, but less frequently going beyond climate activists (Kiilakoski & Piispa, 2023; Wahlstrom *et al.*, 2019; Wallis & Loy, 2021) or the cohort of university students (Daskolia, 2022; Gago & Sá, 2021; Quijano *et al.*, 2023), whose possibility of capturing the voice of young populations varies, specifically taking into account nation's varying rates of third-level education enrolment. On the other hand, and unlike most cross-national studies in environmental public opinion (Leiserowitz *et al.*, 2022; Marquart Pyatt, 2018; Peisker, 2023), the qualitative approach of this research provides dense descriptions enabling the emergence of social representations of the environmental problem, as articulated by these young adults all the while embracing contradictions associated with the challenge of environmental risk engagement (Weintrobe, 2013).

2. Methodology

The study builds on findings from sixteen natural focus groups involving a total of 109 young adults ranging from 18 to 35 years old, 8 of them conducted in Ireland and the other half in Uruguay, during the pre-pandemic year of 2019. Departing from the convenient sampling of reaching university students (2 groups in Ireland, 1 in Uruguay), a diverse set of young adults affiliated to alternative organisations or groups was added to the set target through a purposive sampling strategy (Schäfer *et al.*, 2016). They ended up being, for each country, technical training students, participants in social inclusion programmes, participants of educational or assistance programmes aimed at immigrants, members of amateurs folk bands, young members of rural associations and eco-villagers. This strategy resembles maximum variation sampling (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) while aiming to cover different social experiences that possibly influence the social representations of environmental risk (Olausson, 2011).

Table 1. Characterisation of focus groups

Group Characterisation	Geographic Identification	Number of Participants	Age Range	Majoritarian Gender	Estimated Class	Place of residence
Young Farmers Organisation	Irish	12	23-40	Masculine	High-Medium High	Rural
	Uruguayan	13	18-34	Masculine		
Social Inclusion Programme	Irish	4	20-23	Balance	Low	Urban
	Uruguayan	8	17-22	Feminine		
Third Level Students (1st year)	Irish	8	18-21	Feminine	Medium	Mix
	Uruguayan	3	18-20	Balance		
Third Level Students (last year)	Irish	4	20-29	Feminine	Medium	Mix
	Uruguayan	8	20-33	Feminine		
Amateur Band of Folk Musicians	European-Expats (IE)	5	26-34	Balance	High-Medium High	Urban
	Uruguayan	4	19-28	Masculine	Medium – Medium Low	
Eco-Villagers	European-Expats (IE)	6	19-30	Balance	High-Medium High	Rural
	Uruguayan-Expats (UY)	5	28-33	Balance		
Refugees / Asylum Seekers	International-Immigrants (IE)	3	24-27	Feminine	Low	Rural
	International-Immigrants (UY)	7	19-40	Masculine		Urban
International Education Programme	International-Immigrants (IE)	9	25-33	Feminine	Medium - Medium Low	Urban
Technical Training	Uruguayans	10	18-21	Feminine		

Source: Personal collection, author's elaboration with data collected in the fieldwork of this study (2019).

Focus groups can be potentially understood "as a simulation of these routine but relatively inaccessible communicative contexts that can help us discover the processes by which meaning is socially constructed through everyday talk" (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996, p. 85). Group dynamics are also important as many environmental decisions are revealed to be group decisions (Markowitz *et al.*, 2014). The option for natural focus groups (Schroder, 1994) reinforces the productivity of the discussion as participants know and trust each other. The young adults who took part in this study were already affiliated to groups related to what Giddens (1991) conceptualizes as "projects of the self" (p. 99), working as sites of building and rebuilding life and sense as part of young adults identities. Therefore, besides the search of discursive productivity and validity, the methodological approach acknowledge identity as central in environmental risks' engagement (Corbett, 2006; Stern, *et al.*, 1999).

All participants signed a language-appropriate informed consent form before commencement of the focus group discussions, which were audio recorded for subsequent analysis by the researcher. The guide for discussion included the open exploration of issue awareness and overall assessments of the environmental crisis; for this analysis, the responses to the initial section of the discussions were used: Which environmental problems can you identify and how serious are they? How do you feel related to them if you do?, Where would you rank environmental problems compared with other concerns like economy, education, health, politics, etc.? Why?

In these face-to-face guided discussions, social representations (Moscovici, 1984) of the environmental crisis were disclosed and further classified by the researcher through thematic content analysis of the transcriptions (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2016). The study privileged a qualitative approach that enabled the emergence of dense descriptions of participants' views (Tonon, 2015), while simple tabulation of occurrences helps to weight diverse perspectives across the sample. Afterwards, the selected passages were coded looking for common patterns and themes to group and cluster the data accordingly.

3. Findings

3.1. Salience of environmental issues in Ireland and Uruguay

When asked to mention which are the main environmental problems nowadays, participants belonging to each one of the 16 target groups in Ireland and Uruguay have discussed a range of perceptions regarding the risks associated to the built and natural environment, which were close or distant from their personal and collective experience.

In Ireland, five themes were identified by the researcher, which stem from these observations and experiences reported in the group discussions: (1) climate change, (2) plastic waste, (3) food, (4) depletion of nature, and (5) pollution. Although such themes emerged across various focus groups (see Table 1), they were framed differently (see second column of Table 1), localised in different levels (see third column of Table 1), and discussed with diverse levels of intensity (italics text in Table 2 signals high salience of the issue within the group).

Table 2. Environmental risks reported in Ireland

	Perceived environmental risks*	**Environmental risks' localisation****
Group 1: Folk Musicians	• *Earth pollution* • *Water pollution* • *Contamination of the food* • *Plastics* • Animal extinction • Death of bees • Climate change	○ Worldwide ○ Worldwide ○ Worldwide ○ Worldwide/Personal ○ Worldwide ○ Worldwide ○ Worldwide
Group 2: Inclusion Programme	• *Global warming* • *Emissions by cars* • Animals being killed and illegally traded • Desertification • Deforestation • Plastic pollution in the oceans • Overconsumption and poor recycling habits	○ Undefined/ Worldwide ○ Worldwide/Country-wide/Personal ○ Far region ○ Far region ○ Far region ○ Worldwide ○ Undefined

Continuation of Table 2

	Perceived environmental risks*	Environmental risks' localisation**
Group 3: University Students (First Year)	• *Global warming* • *Fast fashion* • *Plastic cups* • *Industrialised meat production consumption* • Emissions by cars • Icebergs melting • Overpopulation • Habitat destruction and animal depletion	○ Worldwide ○ Country/Far region ○ Worldwide/Country/Personal ○ Undefined ○ Far region ○ Worldwide ○ Worldwide/Far region ○ Worldwide/Far region
Group 4: English Students	• *Air pollution by factories* • *Rubbish domestic disposal/non-recycling* • Pollution by cars • Water pollution • Plastic bottles in the sea	○ Far region (home country) ○ Worldwide ○ Far region (home country) ○ Country/Personal Worldwide/Far region
Group 5: Third Level Students (Advanced)	• *Climate change/Global warming* • *Transportation/Cars* • *Meat and milk consumption* • Plastic usage (bags, cups) • Waste • Soil health	○ Country/Far region ○ Country ○ Worldwide/Country/Personal ○ Community/Personal ○ Worldwide/Country ○ Worldwide
Group 6: Young Farmers	• *Climate change* • *Volatility of seasons* • *Production processes* • Water scarcity/Desertification • Biodiversity	○ Country/Personal ○ Local ○ Worldwide/Far regions ○ Undefined/Worldwide ○ Undefined/Worldwide
Group 7: Refugees /Asylum Seekers	• *Changes in the weather/Seasons* • *Deforestation* • Plastic bags • Housing	○ Country ○ Far region (home country) ○ Country/Personal ○ Country/Personal
Group 8: Eco-villagers	• *Climate change/Justice* • *Not growing own food* • Oil extraction • Plastic production • Chemicals in farming • Chemicals in clothes • Human extinction • Deforestation • Loss of biodiversity	○ Worldwide/Personal ○ Worldwide/Country ○ Undefined/Worldwide ○ Undefined/Worldwide ○ Undefined/Worldwide ○ Undefined/Worldwide/Personal ○ Undefined/Worldwide ○ Far region/Personal ○ Far region/Personal

* Language reflects that of participants.** Researcher's categorization Source: Personal collection.

Across focus groups in Uruguay, five themes were identified in spite of vast areas of overlapping convergence. In descending order of importance: (1) pollution of natural goods, (2) waste creation and disposal, (3) agrochemical-based agriculture, (4) wildlife and biodiversity loss; and (5) climate change (Table 3).

Table 3. Environmental risks reported in Uruguay

	Perceived environmental risks	Location of environmental risks
Group 1: Folk Musicians	• *Car pollution* • *Waste in streets* • *Climate issues* • *Plastic* • *Volatility of seasons* • *Pollution by factories*	○ Undefined/Worldwide ○ Undefined/Worldwide ○ Worldwide/Country/Personal ○ Undefined/Worldwide ○ Country/Personal ○ Undefined/Worldwide
Group 2: Inclusion Programme	• *Pollution in cities* • *Waste in the streets* • *Oiled/Polluted animals* • Factories pollution • Animals being mistreated and killed • Smell • Cigar butts	○ Undefined/ Far region ○ Community/Neighbourhood ○ Far regions ○ Undefined ○ Far regions/Personal ○ Undefined ○ Far region

Continuation of Table 3

	Perceived environmental risks	Location of environmental risks
Group 3: University Students (First Year)	• *Global warming* • *Water pollution* • *Single-use plastics* • *Pesticides* • *Food pollution* • *Pollution*	○ Worldwide ○ Worldwide/Country ○ Undefined/ Personal ○ Undefined ○ Undefined ○ Undefined
Group 4: Technical Training (First Year)	• *Pollution* • *Over exploitation of plants and animals* • *Animal extinction* • *Biodiversity loss* • *Deforestation* • *Water pollution (rivers, ocean)* • Waste • Holes in the ozone layer • Wars causing depletion and also responsible for the lack of natural resources • Climate change • Use of plastic, not recycling • Chemicals in the food, pesticides • Air pollution	○ Worldwide ○ Undefined ○ Undefined/ Worldwide ○ Undefined/Country/Personal ○ Undefined/Personal ○ Community, Far region, Personal ○ Undefined ○ Undefined ○ Far regions ○ Worldwide/Personal ○ Undefined ○ Undefined ○ Undefined/Personal
Group 5: Third Level Students (Advanced)	• *Pulp mills (UPM)* • *Intensity and nature of production and consumption system* • Climate Change • Fires in the Amazonia • Ozone layer holes, gases • Destruction by industries • Waste (batteries, etc.) • Water pollution (ocean and cyanobacteria) • Acoustic pollution in households	○ Country ○ Worldwide ○ Undefined ○ Far region ○ Undefined ○ Undefined ○ Undefined ○ Undefined/Country ○ Undefined
Group 6: Young Farmers	• *Pollution of soil, water and air by agro-chemicals* • *Water pollution* • *Rice mills waste disposal and emissions (dust, smell)* • Pulp mills • Wildlife pollution and depletion • Plastic bags • Individual pollution when throwing papers	○ Country/Community/Personal ○ Undefined/Personal ○ Community/Personal ○ Undefined ○ Community/Personal ○ Country/Personal ○ Undefined
Group 7: Refugees /Immigrants	• *Pollution of soil, air, water by chemicals in food production* • *Non-recycling plastic and nylon (individually, companies, scavengers)* • *Climate Change* • *Waste in cities* • Water pollution (rivers) • Air pollution (smoking) • Chemical waste from factories • Carbon emissions by transport • Individual waste not recycled • Acoustic pollution with noise • Deforestation for extractive activities (Amazonia)	○ Worldwide ○ Country (Uruguay) ○ Worldwide/Planetary ○ Far region/Country ○ Undefined ○ Far region (home country) ○ Undefined/Far regions ○ Undefined ○ Undefined/Personal ○ Undefined/Personal ○ Far region (other)
Group 8: Eco-villagers	• *Transgenic grains agriculture* • *Monoculture agriculture* • *Pollution of (fertile) soil and water (i.e. desertification, agriculture)* • *Water pollution* • Limitless extraction of natural goods • Pollution • CO2, climate change • Air pollution • Waste management (liquid, solid, plastic ...) • Fires	○ Region ○ Region ○ Undefined/Worldwide ○ Undefined/Worldwide ○ Undefined/Worldwide ○ Undefined/Worldwide ○ Undefined/Worldwide ○ Worldwide/Cities ○ Worldwide ○ Undefined/Worldwide

* Language reflects that of participants.** Researcher's categorization Source: Personal collection.

When comparing the two countries (Table 4) it is noticeable how two issues rank in the exact opposite pole: climate change was the top concern in Ireland while the last in Uruguay, and the opposite happened with pollution of natural goods.

Table 4. Environmental Issues Ranking in Ireland and Uruguay

Ireland	Uruguay
#1 Climate Change	#1 Pollution of Natural Goods (mainly Water and Air)
#2 Waste (mainly Plastic)	#2 Waste (creation and disposal)
#3 Food (mainly beef and diary)	#3 Agrochemical Based Agriculture (vegetable and grains)
#4 Nature Depletion	#4 Wildlife and Biodiversity Loss
#5 Pollution (mainly Water)	#5 Climate Change

Source: Personal collection.

The first coincidental theme at the top 3 of the ranking is waste. It was more prominent than food in the Irish sample if considering the number of groups in which it was discussed (7) besides the three cases where it was paramount (English Students, Folk Musicians, First Year University Students). Waste was present in every discussion in Uruguay, more strongly in 5 of them (Refugees/Immigrants, Inclusion Programme participants, First Year University Students, Young Farmers, Folk Musicians) as happened with the impacts of food production which nonetheless was completely excluded in two groups. Social representations on waste will be analysed in detail in the following section.

The significant agricultural profile of Ireland and Uruguay might be manifested in the centrality of environmental risks associated with food production ranking in the third place in both regions, although the discussion is articulated in a very different way across countries. Food is the third most salient issue raised across focus groups in Ireland, discussed strongly in 5 of them (as expected, Young Farmers and Eco Villagers who produce their own food, but also Folk Musicians, First and Advanced University Students) while absent in the remaining three (Refugees/Asylum Seekers, English Students –both groups made of foreigners–, and Participants of the Inclusion Programme, who were Dubliners). In Uruguay, food was also highlighted by Young Farmers and Eco-Villagers along with First Year University students and Refugees/Immigrants coming from rural areas, while excluded in the account of environmental issues of Folk Musicians and of participants of the Inclusion Programme. Overall, it was referred to in 6 out of 8 groups in Uruguay. This theme will be further reported in a subsequent section.

The localisation of the diverse problems by participants helps to better understand their glocal engagement with environmental risks. While half of the groups conducted in Uruguay offered vivid testimonies of local environmental risks (young Farmers, Technical Training Students, Social Inclusion Programme, First Year University Students), they did not substitute concerns of a global scope, which even included any distant ecosystems or creatures. In the other half of the groups, the risks were not localised but described and discussed in very general terms, although some regional events or industries were named. In Ireland, localised discussions only appeared at country level, with only a couple of personal testimonies, notwithstanding the exception of farmers and foreigners living in Ireland, who would refer to their home country as a benchmark for discussion. Besides farming as a whole industry, no single carbon-using company or any other local environmental conflict was mentioned in Irish discussion within the focus groups. References to the global scope of the environmental crisis were predominantly vague in the discussions held in Ireland, referring mainly to shared global spaces or resources like oceans or soil which were hardly located in specific places.

In parallel with specific risks identified and discussed across the focus groups in Ireland and Uruguay, "the" environmental problem is defined as a more general situation or as an intertwined phenomenon involving economic, political, cultural and socio-structural conditions. In both countries, 6 out of the 8 focus groups did it, while with less intensity in Uruguay, where specific issues received more attention than in Ireland. In Ireland for instance, half of the groups skipped the listing of specific environmental risks and spontaneously turned to structural factors that could be considered primary roots of the environmental crisis, and explicitly calling for a systemic vision. As the conversation advanced, further examples of issue awareness provided,

suggested that the initial skip of them was due to the assumption of a shared diagnosis on the visible challenges, while the real questions had to do with underlying dynamics. The final section of findings will provide insights on these social representations of this dimension of the environmental crisis.

3.2. Social representations of two coincidental environmental risks

3.2.1. Waste generation and disposal

Plastic was the paradigmatic case of pollution associated in Ireland with consumption of products that were not properly disposed or classified afterwards. Coffee cups, bottles, nylon wraps and even clothes –usually associated with micro-plastic pollution– were the examples afforded by these young adults. According to a First Year University Student: "I have the impression that our generation is aware of the fact that there is an issue: Don't waste plastic, don't eat too much meat, don't buy stuff, don't waste too much water…"

Participants were critical about over purchasing (and underusing) products –especially fast fashion in some groups–, but also about the failures in disposal routines of non-compostable garbage in households, companies, and even in the case of entire communities. As a participant of the Social Inclusion Programme put it: "People are so wasteful… I know a lot of people who reuse and recycle, but the majority wouldn't care to do it". If a lack of will is pointed to by some participants, others argue that it is also a matter of knowledge and "culture". Some English Students, for instance, put it this way:

> *Subject A:* We always think about the big companies but not always everybody knows a lot about recycling rubbish and this stuff. Because we just have here the places and we would do, like, what we think it's the best as we can but we don't know what to do. I was talking with my boss recently and she said that in the recycling bin you have to put just things that are clean and they are dry and my boyfriend, like, he cuts little things as well and put inside of the bin as well, then I know a lot of people that don't know about this. And I don't know if we are doing the best we can as well, and I can see bottles in the sea, I don't know if we are doing our best as well, it's not just about companies …
>
> *Subject B:* I think it's a cultural thing because for example in here some people have this culture of separate properly all the rubbish and in some places, they don't have that culture.

Individual initiative, but pushed by green policy appear in the testimony of a participant in the Refugees discussion. The Irish governmental ban on plastic bags was mentioned by Advanced University Students, when identifying barriers and facilitators for adopting pro-environmental habits. Meanwhile, a participant from the Refugees focus group highlighted the alternative compostable options introduced in the market:

> I remember when I came to Ireland, 2 years ago, they started making these kinds of bags to protect the environment. These bags could be used just for the food you had left, so this bag is a very kind of healthy bag, so it would –I don't know how to say it in English but I will try– it would mix with the food and it will be gone. So that won't damage or cause any problem for the environment, which was a very good idea that I used at home.

Some Folk Musicians, echoing similar sentiments as Eco-villagers, located the problem of plastics not at the consumer end of the process, but at the (over)producers end, being unwilling to reduce it:

> *Subject A:* The plastic, for instance, as well. There is no interest to reduce it because they have to manufacture to produce plastic…
>
> *Subject B:* Yeah. It's cheaper.
>
> *Subject A:* It's cheaper and it's already there, so they just have to not change, they don't want to invest and lose money to change the technology to make another material that doesn't damage. The technology is there, there is people that don't want to invest in this. They don't change. We are now packaging fruit without peel, it's like.. really?
>
> *Many subjects:* Yeah!

Companies using large amounts of plastic in order to provide services to customers, represented a middle ground between plastic production and the final consumer. A First Year University Student argued:

I just think it takes one massive, like, multinational company, that could make such a difference in years, say it something like McDonalds. If they just change their stalls from plastic or they cut the cups from plastic to, like, compostable, it could, like, in the future change so much. It just takes one person in power like that, it could make such a difference, so like why are they not doing it?

An Advanced University Student brought to light the discouraging experience of finding economic barriers in small companies that use lots of paper and plastic to reduce and dispose it properly.

Finally, plastics in the ocean are also a recurrent image pointing to waste disposal across the discussions, usually associated with affected flora and fauna in the sea.

In Uruguay, as stated before, waste generation and disposal was also a main concern for the young adults interviewed, reaching all of the groups surveyed in Uruguay, while it occupied a prominent role in the discussion of specific groups as the Social Inclusion Programme or the Refugees/Immigrants.

The following discussion among youngsters of Piedras Blancas, the peripheral neighbourhood of Montevideo where the Social Inclusion Programme takes place, involved at least half of the participants of the focus group. It best reflects the trend of identifying pollution with the presence of domestic or individual waste in the urban environment also raised in other groups.

> *Subject A:* Why would pollution be our fault? No.
> *Subject B:* Willingly or unwillingly, we also pollute.
> *Subject C:* Yes, we cannot talk on behalf of others but for ourselves.
> *Subject D:* For instance, you have waste containers to dispose your waste, but there are people who throw it outside it, or when they are already full of garbage.
> *Subject B:* Exactly.
> *Subject A:* Yes, but the problem is the people who are supposed to come and empty the containers.
> *Subject C:* But, again, we cannot think of others' tasks: If I see it full, then I won't put my waste there.
> *Subject E:* They must come once a week at least …
> *Subject B:* Sure, but if it is full, you shouldn't throw it there.
> *Subject E:* But I cannot leave my waste at home, I would be polluting my home.
> *Subject C:* So, you pollute the street? It's the same.

For them, disposal of family waste is a daily concern and a risk experienced first-hand, with which responsibility and agency appeared intertwined. Lately, in this group, waste disposal was discussed again and someone added complexity to the issue by putting on the table how garbage provides an essential source of living for scavengers, which all agree to consider as a scenario where they could eventually end up being at.

The same perspective of garbage as an opportunity of making a living was emphasised by participants from Cuba and Venezuela. While Immigrants coming from rural areas would report a similar experience as that of the young Farmers highlighting the pollution of livelihoods, those coming from cities would focus instead on waste management at different levels as being a central environmental risk. A passionate discussion about recycling and how it should or should not be done, either in their domestic domain or in Uruguay as a whole, marked the predominantly urban focus of the discussion within this group.

> *Subject A:* We need to start from our little environment, what do we do with our closest environment the ones that live in guesthouses, what kind of things do we do, how do we separate our garbage…
> *Subject B:* The companies using raw materials recycle everything, the aluminium, the paper, the plastics, the copper […] I don't see [it] here […]. At home, there are even people who are dedicated to collecting that; when at parties at night people drink, buy canned beer and throw it away, there are people who pick it up, then [they] go and sell it. It is purchased by weight. Here I haven't seen that, that kind of business or particular individuals doing it, or the State. When I travel around, I see that people have lots of scrap that is not recovered, it is not recycled.
> *Subject C:* In Cuba, there are people devoted to that activity, they depend on it for making a living. I see here people getting into the garbage containers to search for clothes to sell, but I don't see anybody collecting beer cans, milk boxes, nylon that takes centuries to degrade in the environment.

Not recycling household waste and plastic in particular were identified as major environmental problems in many other discussions, with less of a trace of personal engagement and at a general level, suggesting a national or worldwide scope. Besides reflections on how plastic bags, paper or nylon (even cigarettes butts)

are not recycled as much as it is technically possible, there is criticism concerning consumption of single-use plastics or simply consuming too much plastic. As in Ireland, within this second trend of focusing on wasteful consumption, lifestyles are under the scope of investigation including their own, while reflecting on how the production lines and the consumption habits necessarily create more and more garbage. Moreover, it is stressed by some participants how, in the process of consumption, humans are "the only animals who produce garbage" and do not know how to handle it.

While most of the groups presented a discussion focused on environmental risks, either at the production or at the consumption end of the process, Advanced Third Level Students agreed on a more complete analysis of the current waste generating system:

> I believe that if we measure it in terms of impact, beyond the shocking news, our production and consumption system leaves an environmental footprint that is astonishing. That is, we exploit natural resources generating pollution, we process the production after [...]. You have stages and you pollute in all these stages, and you produce waste through all the stages to produce disposable products, increasingly disposable, which ends up being waste. So, if we are polluting in all these stages, in different ways, and the product has a fairly short use, ends up being garbage, then what do we end up doing?

A reference to mismanagement of industrial waste was one of the relevant issues within young Farmers, who even provided personal experiences of this problem: "I used to work in a rice mill company and, well, I had this interdict with my boss because of throwing filters, the gutters, gas oil disposal...".

3.2.2. Social representations of food production and consumption

In Ireland, young adults reported concerns about the quality of the food, its availability, alongside the environmental impact of food production and consumption. Besides the criticism raised when discussing climate change, participants afforded differing approaches to food as a problem.

For example, the issue of vegetarianism and veganism was widely discussed as a trend among younger generations, especially cited for its eventual contribution to mitigating the environmental crisis, not to mention the problematic approach of those who promote it. These passages of First Year University Student's discussion offer some evidence of such perspectives, which certainly went beyond global warming in reflecting attitudes towards all kind of living creatures:

> *Subject A:* I also think it's an industrial type of issue because the meat process that we get everywhere in our country is really, really bad and dangerous. And is affecting the environment terribly. But in Mexico it's becoming so popular for the new vegan and vegetarian drinks that they are pushing farm into deserts and undoing deserts to make them fruitful. So, it's really on industries and how much they care besides profit for their land.
>
> *Subject B:* Veganism, you know, they are so passionate about it, you know?
>
> Choir: Yeah, yeah.
>
> *Subject B:* It's not only saying "oh, I don't like animal products", which is fair enough, but then you see kind of how a friend of mine starting to be like "oh, it helps you feel better" but suddenly become "oh my God, why do you eat animals, that's disgusting" and saying "how would you protest for sea health and you still eat fish." And it's all a sort of anger almost, and that's the stigma about vegans being so passionate that they are angry, so then people almost get kind of... I don't know... They will eat meat and be like "screw it, vegans." It's just, like, a kind of sign. So, there is definitely a stigma around, and at the same time other people is just "oh, vegan, cool, that's your choice, that's cool", while things online get much crueller.

Animal products are a strong focus of discussion in the two groups of university students and also for the young Farmers, with a clear divide between urban and rural perspectives. Young Farmers gave priority to the framework of emissions which brings about climate change, but they went further in suggesting other environmental and social risks of plant-based diets:

> *Subject A:* Not everybody has to produce food, but everybody eats food, and they think that they can substitute Irish dairy Irish milk with soya milk or veggie burgers or whatever the case may be ... But they don't have any idea of the consequences of the miles through which the food is carried through land, the carbon footprint, the use of water...

> *Subject B:* The loss of jobs.
>
> *Subject C:* They all think it's, like, "oh, let's reduce our dairy, let's reduce our beef production in Ireland", and that's going to solve climate change. But it will reduce our emissions and will increase emissions elsewhere around the world multiple times if they have to produce what we are producing. And I think that it is a missing link that we... as consumers are very very hard to be convinced of all that.
>
> *Subject C:* But it's also the ethics of all of the food that's been produced for let's say, vegan diets...
>
> *Subject E:* But people don't see that.

Also, an Advanced University Student whose family owns a farm, brought dissensus into her group of discussion, where not eating beef had been mentioned once as a much-needed pro-environmental action to individually embrace:

> I hear the arguments about veganism and vegetarianism, like, saying killing cows or milking cows is wrong. But you have to milk cows or they become sore and they die. You have to milk them. That kind of thing, it's just that they are bred for a purpose, but, aren't humans bred for a purpose as well? Like, you don't have a child for fun... (laughter.)

Further references to environmental risks associated with food did not focus on emissions or meat of any kind, while they did focus on destructive agricultural practices associated to cereals or vegetables. Agrochemicals are a concern for Eco-villagers, who explicitly blamed farmers as "they use a lot of chemicals which are thrown into nature" in food production. At the consumer end, they expressed concern about access to healthy food, while portraying a clear position around food sovereignty, as expected, given their involvement in permacultural practices.

> *Subject A:* There are people who always need to go to the supermarket for everything or pay people for the food.
>
> *Subject B:* People who live in Dublin, I would say, inner city Dublin, who live in Council houses, who have concrete back gardens and no access to any sort of growing place. And those people would still buy all from the supermarkets just because they're poor but they buy more terrible food. They still are completely dependent.

"Pollution of the food" appears within the top environmental problems listed by Folk Musicians as well, which is better understood later on, when discussing responsibilities for environmental degradation:

> *Subject A:* Because it's cheaper, or because the people who manage the manufacture of this, Monsanto Bayer, is buying the politicians so they don't wanna ban it, I mean [sic] ...
>
> Choir: Yeah.
>
> *Subject A:* People who can control this are not controlling it.
>
> Subject B and C: Yeah.
>
> *Subject A:* We can take it as a personal issue but I don't grow corn, you know, and the people who grow corn the cheapest way is to do it with this kind of products .. Again, it's about profit.

The food related emergent theme among the Uruguayan sample refers to agrochemicals as the primary response to the question of the main environmental concerns, which sometimes included the criticism of the whole agricultural system in place.

The use of chemicals in proved to be the most striking issue for the majority of Young Farmers, and one which was inextricably associated to the mainstream agricultural system for Eco-villagers, in particular. Any use of pesticides was problematic for Eco-villagers, who were instead practicing organic agriculture, and growing food without the use of artificial chemicals. This was mentioned as an interesting idea for some Young Farmers. Other participants focused their criticism on the increased usage (Immigrants) or the bad management (some of the Young Farmers) of agrochemicals.

Instead, the youngest students of Third Level Education apparently did not perceive the issue as so significant and labelled this risk as "food pollution". This perspective, located at the consumer end, was reported as a personal experience in various groups. For instance, a First Year Student of the Technical Training Group exposed:

> I had problems in the intestine and there was food that made me sick when having too much of it. Then I realised that, when I ate fruit which had this little powder of the chemicals, it was even worse. So, I was always trying to wash very well the fruit, choosing and cleaning it so that it would not have much chemicals. Where I live, there are some greengrocers where you can ask and they tell you, look, this is a more natural fruit, so with that I was always very careful.

The large majority of Young Farmers shared this concern about the dangers of agrochemicals use in food production, especially vegetables besides the previously cited case of the rice dryer. Their own activity must have been more related to animal farms, as their perspective kept some distance from plants production processes:

> *Subject A:* We sold oranges for a country (I don't remember which one), they tested them and found agrochemical, products that are not used there, that are forbidden, so they rejected the oranges.
>
> *Subject A:* For instance, nowadays we have a Senator, in politics, who is from the Green Party, who is an Agricultural Engineer. He owns a farm, he grows vegetables and he does everything naturally. With him we discussed the effects of agrochemicals.
>
> *Subject B:* It happened that at home we had many vegetables, people would go and buy from us because they said we had something natural, not using anything. I mean, they would choose to buy from us, right? It changes the taste of the things ...
>
> *Subject C:* More natural!
>
> *Subject B:* Of course
>
> *Subject D:* Sometimes there are processes...
>
> *Subject E:* ... Like an orange that only gets the colour inside a chamber!
>
> *Subject B:* Once, we were cooking French fries with a friend and she told me that her hands were red because of all that is put in the potatoes to treat them.

Eco-villagers include pesticides in a larger frame that puts the agricultural system at the core. Their social representations of environmental risks mirror Young Farmers' focus on the impact of industrialised food production on natural resources and in human health, but they offer a structural analysis instead of the eye witnessing approach of young Farmers.

> *Subject A:* Transgenic agriculture as a big problem today. It occurs also in this territory, right? Argentina, us, Brazil a little bit up North. I mean the exit of grains through the Río de la Plata River.
>
> *Subject B:* Well, I was going to talk about monocultures. The first thing that came to mind, like, this was monocultures, but I agree with them.
>
> *Subject C:* The symptoms that most alarm me, at an environmental level, are soil degradation, the loss of fertile soil, which goes hand in hand with the increase in desertification, which is connected with climate change. Agricultural practices.

In Uruguay, cereal and vegetable production was also at the background on some of the discussions about the pollution of livelihoods by factories or farmers.

3.3. Social representations of "the" environmental crisis

In Ireland, the groups which focused on a broader or structural perspective of the environmental problems at stake were the Eco-villagers, the Advanced University Students, the Folk Musicians and the young Farmers, being absent in the discourse of the Inclusion Programme and the Refugees/Asylum Seekers.

These two levels of thought found across the sample of young adults, is explicitly acknowledged within the group of Folk Musicians in Ireland. One of them summarised the diverse set of opinions by explaining that earth, water and food pollution are the environmental problems from a practical point of view that is regarded as "what keeps people alive." However, at the structural level, "in the big picture", the main environmental problem is "the fact that the environment and the economy have taken a different path, and the whole economy is not counting on the limited resources of us."

In Uruguay, the two levels were brought by Eco-villagers, although with a cultural and even philosophical perspective that not only acknowledges a deeper crisis underneath the specific issues but also critique the economic approach to nature.

> *Subject A:* The image that comes to me is that of taking nature as a resource, and seeing it as a resource and not as goods, or as life itself. That is, seeing it as something, that can be extracted and it can be processed and sold in the industry. Not having that notion that it is something that, if not there, we do not live, I mean, we are extinct. Like, I see the strong image of the infinite super extraction and I am aware that it is not infinite. I suppose I feel it as a life-giving thing, as goods, as something that gives us life, I guess I feel that way.
>
> *Subject B:* The problem is not, like, the pollution, the CO_2, the earth, the fires. No, that is what we can see but, in depth, it seems to me that the problem has to do with that change in perception.

Three main social representations of "the" environmental crisis emerged in the focus groups conducted in Ireland. The (capitalist) economic system, involving unsustainable dynamics of production and consumption of goods, along with a profit-oriented culture, were the main explanations of "the" central environmental problem as broadly considered. In this regard, they mirror early concerns of Marxist analysis regarding the treadmill of production, while also sketching a critique that identifies the existence of a dominant culture along with other cultures based on alternative values. Secondly, power inequalities were identified as a critical factor in correctly understanding the reach, nature, and building process necessary to assess overall environmental risk. Therefore, the acknowledgement of asymmetries that mark the environmental crisis, as argued in the second chapter also prevail in these discussions, although no region divides are clearly articulated except for one or two interventions. Finally, with less prominence, social factors were signalled, in the form of non-beneficial relational values held by individuals –relatable to a capitalist culture or as social dynamics like rural urban divides essentially misleading the evaluation of the environmental problems and their potential solutions. Again ethics, in its relational dimension, appeared as the potential root of environmental problems.

The focus on the structural level tensions appeared with less intensity in Uruguay than in Ireland, being central among Eco-villagers, Advanced Third Level Students –as happened in Ireland– and Technical Training Students. Meanwhile, it was completely excluded in two discussions: that of Social Inclusion Programme participants, as has happened in Ireland, and also among young Farmers.

Across groups, instead of focusing on the economy, the most recurrent perspectives pointed to social and cultural dynamics that cause and eventually prevent uncovering solutions to the environmental crisis; ranging from incomplete education to ethical challenges, such as a generalised lack of consciousness and respect. Furthermore, misperceptions and public framing of the problems were identified as underlying challenges; exaggerating the crisis, creating a form of psychosis leading to scepticism, political (ab)use of the environmental agenda, and also the commodification of nature as the dominant vision, as Eco-villagers early explained. Another emergent discourse across groups remains that of power inequalities associated to environmental problems. On the one hand, differentiated effects and agency are attributed to low-income populations and relatively under-developed countries. On the other hand, in a longitudinal perspective, the imbalance registered between actual and future generations is discussed, covering for example differential responsibilities and negative impacts of the environmental crisis. Lastly, and especially intense in certain groups, "the" core environmental problem was fundamentally associated with the unsustainable consumption system –although not explicitly labelled as capitalist, as happened in Ireland– involving technologies and alienated powerless people.

4. Discussion

One of the first challenges when studying environmental concern is to fully understand "the environmental component" (Corbett, 2006, p. 61). Built and natural environment at risk, in urban and rural contexts, local and global portraits of the crisis, personal experiences and abstract ideas, causes and effects, events and structures appear in participants' social representations of the current environmental crisis. Additionally, concerns were expressed at a top-level policy approach and also at the personal level of knowledge, affective expressions and behaviours, or behavioural intentions (Corbett, 2006).

While the puzzling array of issues reported in each country accounts for the three critical areas signalled in the official diagnosis of the environmental crisis –climate, biodiversity and pollution emergencies (United Nations Environment Programme, 2021)– there is a clear regional divide in priorities.

Climate change certainly outperform other environmental risks in the discourses of young adults in Ireland, living in a region with ambitious policies of mitigation and adaptation. Alternatively, climate is scarcely ever discussed in Uruguay. Neither local vulnerabilities to climate change nor contributions to global emissions received any attention in the southern part of the study, despite the dominant meat-producing profile of Uruguay and the remarkable transition to renewable energy that attracted international attention in the last decade. Furthermore, the groups in Ireland where climate change did not emerge in the initial discussion were probably not surprisingly those whose participants came from other global regions, such as Brazil, Mexico, Turkey, Ethiopia.

Instead, Uruguayan participants' most discussed theme is the pollution of natural goods –mainly water and air–, which only appears at the end of the ranking of Irish issues of concern. The focus on this pervasive issue might reflect the environmental impacts of a continent where extractivism have been historically central to the countries economies and socio environmental conflicts (Martínez Alier, 2008). The effect of context in environmental concern is a coincidental finding with European (Peisker, 2023) and peripheral countries (Etoundi, 2020) assessments.

However, this strong contextual feature did not displace distant spaces' references and generalized –apparently global level concerns, thus confirming previous studies (Pong & Tam, 2023)– in the focus group discussions held in Uruguay. In Ireland, with few first hand testimonies of environmental impacts coming from Young Farmers or foreigners referring to their home country, the issues were usually located at the country level and within a global scope crisis where no specific vulnerable places abroad were acknowledged. A remarkable case is that of participants of Social Inclusion Programmes who, in both countries but especially in Ireland, challenged previous finding (Clarke & Agyeman, 2011) pointing to the fact that vulnerable populations tend to localise their perceptions of environmental issues and responsibilities, rather than engage in talk about wider environmental issues and responsibilities.

Regarding distance in a temporal and not a geographical dimension, another interesting finding is that, for young people living in Uruguay, environmental risk is generally not a major potential or future damage, but mainly an everyday reality that is occurring today, as they experience pollution directly from harmful effects on the natural and built environment that surrounds them. Thus, the international division between polluting regions and polluted regions seems to be mainly reflected in the perceptions of the research participants and in the experiences that they report. According to this study, Ireland performs as a "risk donor country", while Uruguay plays the role of "risk recipient country" as signalled by Beck (2009, p. 30).

The meanings of waste and the specific challenges associated to it vary across countries. In Ireland, the environmental impact of the individual and corporations use and disposal of plastic is the primary focus, in a context where recycling facilities are given and overconsumption a generalised pattern. In Uruguay, waste is on the streets and polluting nature as a very first problem of disposal; it appears hand in hand with scavengers' activities and other less stigmatized ways of finding economic opportunities out of the garbage, or to irresponsible industries. The conversations around the issue uncover differences of prosperity, institutional and infraestructure facilitation of pro environmental action, and equality between the two countries, which mirror those of the regions to which they belong.

Regarding the environmental problems associated to food production, regional divides are found between these two agri-export countries. While in Ireland beef and dairy are currently under intense scrutiny, vegetables and grains are more contentious in Uruguay, with meat production and consumption hardly problematised although it is a huge part of its exports while it does not happen the same with vegetable farming activities in Ireland. If no environmental conflict around agrochemicals was mapped at the moment in Uruguay, environmental organisations as Friends of the Earth Uruguay have extensively reported on the issue, which is a salient one close by in Argentina. Therefore, while a risk normalization effect appears in Uruguay, it does not happen the same in Ireland. Focus group discussion in Ireland reveal a clear divide in the criticism to national agricultural practices, while in Uruguay young farmers were highly critical to close by agricultural practices which did not involve cattle.

As in previous research of environmental risks perceptions of laypeople (Kaiser *et al.*, 2020), along with stating their main concerns in terms of specific environmental issues, perceived causes or contributing factors to these issues were spontaneously expressed, reflecting participants' worldviews, experiences, and assumptions.

The early identification of the environmental crisis within structural or systemic issues, was stronger in Ireland but recurrent across the whole sample, which seems to transcend eco-gestures unlike young students of other European countries (Gavin & Audrin, 2023).

In Ireland, there seem to be no novelty in identifying environmental risks for those young adults, who alternatively signalled "the capitalist system" simply as at fault, through either elite sustaining its hegemonic structures or the whole of humanity embracing more individualistic anthropocentric culture. In Uruguay, the structural analysis also appeared across most of the groups after listing specific risks and more philosophically oriented to social and cultural trends. It suggests that the environmental conversation did not seem to suffer from the same fatigue in the Southern country, where testimonies and explanations were more frequent than embracing judgements and macro-economic assessments in the diagnosis of the environmental crisis.

Overall, the extended environmental awareness across studied groups of young adults, where only one of the groups of every country (eco-villagers) could be clearly designed and considered environmentalist, suggests very low incidence of the types of delay or denial identified regarding environmental challenges (Weintrobe, 2013) among these young adults. The extended environmental concern not only happened across world regions, but also across groups where socio economic vulnerability was clearly identified on discussed heartfelt environmental concerns, thus aligning with recent studies (Gavin & Audrin, 2023) and contradicting Inglehart's (1995) influential explanation of environmental concern as primarily dependent on affluence.

5. Conclusion

As the notion of environmental risks involves the perception of threats and its articulation by the subjects, the uncovering of what participants do consider as environmental problems is a key question to tackle societal responses to the environmental crisis. Besides their condition as being direct heirs of a world at environmental risk, young adults constitute critical networked publics who should be better understood, in terms of going beyond apocalyptic or celebratory interpretations of their glocal engagement with social and environmental issues.

This study tried to uncover and compare between Ireland and Uruguay which environmental issues remain crucial for a diverse set of young citizens, along with how coincidental concerns might be represented as an environmental risk across countries. evidence points to the acknowledgement, in both Ireland and Uruguay, of an environmental crisis that tends to be expressed in a globalised vocabulary and signal global tropes, with regional divides starting to emerge through the varying centrality and meanings of the topics across countries. The salient coincidence in two themes strongly associated to pollution -food production and waste- is a remarkable finding, while the top one theme signals a regional divide in the most concerning topics: climate change in the North and the direct pollution of livelihoods down South. The detailed analysis of coincidental issues across regions confirms the effect of the political, economical and socio-cultural context in environmental risk building. Finally,another point of convergence is the reflection on the deep roots of the environmental crisis, with especially Irish participants claiming for a systemic change led by corporations and backed by consumers, better articulated by eco-villagers from both latitudes. They provide a preliminary approach to the perception of the individual and collective agency of ordinary people in withstanding the environmental crisis. This last point contributes to answering the third research question of the study: how structural factors are perceived as key to an environmentally sustainable system.

As concern has been found to be predictive of actual pro-environmental behaviours, at both the public and the private level (Oreg & Katz-Gerro, 2006), the extensive mapping of environmental issues could be analysed in a positive light. In the first instance, it could be concluded that the young people investigated in Uruguay have a greater potential for engagement with the environmental risks, if we consider their proximity to ongoing acute environmental problems that many of them report. However, the early and highly critical discussion of responses of young people living in Ireland and the level of concern expressed, despite the spatio-temporal remoteness of the environmental damage perceived, makes it impossible to affirm that they are less engaged overall. Therefore, a discussion on responsibility and agency could shed more light on the process from evaluating awareness to actual engagement with environmental risk through potential disavowal dynamics at the individual and collective level (Weintrobe, 2013).

References

Ballantyne, A. G., Wibeck, V., & Neset, T.-S. (2016). Images of climate change – a pilot study of young people's perceptions of ICT-based climate visualization. *Climatic Change, 134*(1-2), 73-85. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-015-1533-9

Beck, U. (2009). *World at risk*. Polity Press.

Brereton, P. (2018). *Environmental literacy and new digital audiences*. Routledge.

Castells, M. (1996). *The Rise of the Network Society*. Blackwell Publishers.

Clarke, L., & Agyeman, J. (2011). Shifting the Balance in Environmental Governance: Ethnicity, Environmental Citizenship and Discourses of Responsibility. *Antipode, 43*(5), 1773-1800. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2010.00832.x

Corbett, J. B. (2006). *Communicating nature: How we create and understand environmental messages*. Island Press.

Daskolia, M. (2022). Exploring the beliefs, concerns and understandings about climate change of Greek University students from the Social Sciences and Humanities. In W. Leal & E. Manolas (Eds.), *Climate change in the mediterranean and middle eastern region* (pp. 473-498). Springer Nature.

Etoundi, J. C., Kay, N., & Gaymard, S. (2020). Social Representations of Risk in Cameroon: Influence of Sociopolitical and Cultural Context. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology, 8*(2), 642-661. https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.v8i2.1218

Gago, T., & Sá, I. (2021). Environmental worry and wellbeing in young adult university students. *Current research in environmental sustainability, 3*, 100064. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.crsust.2021.100064

Gavin, A. S., & Audrin, C. (2023). ESD in school: understanding French-speaking Swiss pupils' representations of sustainability. *Environmental education research, 29*(8), 1144-1154. https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2022.2128061

Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: self and society in the late modern age*. Stanford University Press.

Guha, R., & Martínez Alier, J. (1997). *Varieties of environmentalism: essays North and South*. Routledge.

Hagen, B., Middel, A., & Pijawka, D. (2016). European climate change perceptions: public support for mitigation and adaptation policies. *Environmental policy and governance, 26*(3), 170-183. https://doi.org/10.1002/eet.1701

Heise, U. K. (2008). *Sense of place and sense of planet: the environmental imagination of the global*. Oxford University Press.

Inglehart, R. (1995). Public support for environmental protection: objective problems and subjective values in 43 societies. *PS: Political science & politics, 28*(1), 57-72. https://doi.org/10.2307/420583

Kaiser, M. L., Hand, M. D., & Pence, E. K. (2020). Individual and community engagement in response to environmental challenges experienced in four low-income urban neighborhoods. *International journal of environmental research and public health, 17*(6), 1831. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17061831

Kiilakoski, T., & Piispa, M. (2023). facing the climate crisis, acting together: young climate activists on building a sustainable future. In *Living well in a world worth living in for all, Volume 1: Current practices of social justice, sustainability and wellbeing* (pp. 211-224). Springer Nature Singapore.

Leiserowitz, A., Marlon, J. R., Wang, X., Bergquist, P., Howe, P. D., Maibach, E., Mildenberger, M., & Rosenthal, S. (2022). Change in US state-level public opinion about climate change: 2008-2020. *Environmental research letters, 17*(12), 124046. https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/aca702

Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2002). *Qualitative communication research methods*. Sage.

Luís, S., Vauclair, C. M., & Lima, M. L. (2018). Raising awareness of climate change causes? Cross-national evidence for the normalization of societal risk perception of climate change. *Environmental science & policy, 80*, 74-81. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2017.11.015

Lunt, P., & Livingstone, S. (1996). Rethinking the focus group in media and communications research. *Journal of communication, 46*(2), 79-98. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1996.tb01475.x

Markowitz, E., Corner, A., & Pidgeon, N. (2014). Public engagement with climate change: the role of human values. *Wiley interdisciplinary reviews: climate change, 5*(3), 411-422. https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.269

Marquart-Pyatt, S. T. (2018). Trust and environmental activism across regions and countries. *Journal of environmental studies and sciences, 8*(3), 249-263. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13412-018-0498-1

Martínez Alier, J. (2008). Conflictos ecológicos y justicia ambiental. *Papeles, 103*, 11-27.

Moscovici, S. (1984). The phenomenon of social representations. In R. M. Farr & S. Moscovici (Eds.), *Social representations* (pp. 3-69). Cambridge University Press.

Olausson, U. (2011). "We're the Ones to Blame": Citizens' representations of climate change and the role of the media. *Environmental communication: A journal of nature and culture, 5*(3), 281-299. https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2011.585026

Oreg, S., & Katz-Gerro, T. (2006). Predicting proenvironmental behavior cross-nationally. *Environment and behavior, 38*(4), 462-483. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013916505286012

Parkhill, K. A., Pidgeon, N. F., Henwood, K. L., Simmons, P., & Venables, D. (2010). From the familiar to the extraordinary: local residents' perceptions of risk when living with nuclear power in the UK. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 35*(1), 39-58. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-5661.2009.00364.x

Peisker, J. (2023). Context matters: The drivers of environmental concern in European regions. *Global Environmental Change, 79*, 102636. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2023.102636

Pong, V. y Tam, K. P. (2023). Relationship between global identity and pro-environmental behavior and environmental concern: a systematic review. *Frontiers in Psychology, 14*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1033564

Quijano, S. A., Cerón, V. A., Guevera-Fletcher, C. E., Bermúdez, I. M., Gutiérrez, C. A., & Pelegrin, J. S. (2023). Knowledge in regard to environmental problems among university students in Cali, Colombia. *Sustainability, 15*(21), 15315. https://doi.org/10.3390/su152115315

Rahman, S. U., & Luomala, H. (2021). Comparison of motivational patterns in sustainable food consumption between Pakistan and Finland: duties or self-reliance?. *Journal of international food & agribusiness marketing, 33*(5), 459-486. https://doi.org/10.1080/08974438.2020.1816243

Roudometof, V. (2005). Transnationalism, cosmopolitanism and glocalization. *Current sociology, 53*(1), 113-135. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392105048291

Salas Reyes, R., Nguyen, V. M., Schott, S., Berseth, V., Hutchen, J., Taylor, J., & Klenk, N. (2021). A Research agenda for affective dimensions in climate change risk perception and risk communication. *Frontiers in climate*, *3*, 751310. https://doi.org/10.3389/fclim.2021.751310

Schäfer, M., Berglez, P., Wessler, H., Eide, E., Nerlich, B., & O'Neill, S. (2016). *Investigating mediated climate change communication: A best-practice guide*. Jönköping University, School of Education and Communication.

Schrøder, K. C. (1994). Audience semiotics, interpretive communities and the 'ethnographic turn' in media research. *Media, culture and society, 16*(2), 337-347. https://doi.org/10.1177/016344379401600208

Stern, P. C., Dietz, T., Abel, T., Guagnano, G. A. & Kalof, L. (1999). A value-belief-norm theory of support for social movements: The case of environmental concern. *Human ecology review, 6*, 81-97.

Tonon, G. (2015). Integration of qualitative and quantitative methods in quality of life studies. In G. Tonon (Ed.), *Qualitative Studies in Quality of Life: Methodology and Practice* (pp. 53-60). Springer Cham.

United Nations Environment Programme (2021). *Making Peace with Nature: A scientific blueprint to tackle the climate, biodiversity and pollution emergencies*. UNEP.

Urry, J. (2013). Global flows and global citizenship. In E. Isin, *Democracy, citizenship and the global city* (pp. 62-78). Routledge.

Wahlström, M., Sommer, M., Kocyba, P., De Vydt, M., De Moor, J., Davies, S.,... & Buzogany, A. (2019). *Protest for a future: Composition, mobilization and motives of the participants in Fridays For Future climate protests on 15 March, 2019 in 13 European cities*. Kennislink, 1-121.

Wallis, H., & Loy, L. S. (2021). What drives pro-environmental activism of young people? A survey study on the Fridays For Future movement. *Journal of environmental psychology, 74*, 101581. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2021.101581

Weintrobe, S. (2013). *Engaging with climate change: Psychoanalytic and interdisciplinary perspectives*. Routledge.

Brief CV of the author

Victoria Gómez-Márquez holds a PhD in Environmental Communication (Dublin City University) and a Master Degree in Social Policy and Community Mediation (Autonomous University of Barcelona). She runs the Department of Public Opinion at the School of Communication of the University of Montevideo, where she leads a research line focused on communication for sustainable development. She is also a external member of DCU Centre for Climate and Society. She has done research on environmental attitudes, audience mediations of pro-environmental messages and eco-influencers. She directs the action-research project "Green Map: Young Environmental Action", developed with UNICEF, the US Embassy and civil society organizations.

Funding

This work was supported by the PhD Scholarships that the author received from the National Agency for Research and Innovation of Uruguay, ANII (Grant Identifier POS_EXT_2017_1_146694) and the Irish Research Council, IRC (Grant Identifier GOIPG/2018/2963), to develop the research project "Stories for Sustainability in the Semi-peripheries of the World System: Online Audiovisual Media Influence on Young People's Attitudes in Ireland and Uruguay".

Conflict of interests

The author have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.