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Climate Risk Perception and Trust – Presence of a Social Trap for Willingness to Act in Favour of Climate Mitigation and Support for Renewables: A Cross-sectional Study of Four European Countries

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Abstract : Achieving a sufficient global solution to climate change seems elusive through disappointing climate agreements and lack of cooperation. However, is this reluctance of coordination deep rooted on a more individual, societal level within countries due to a fundamental lack of social and institutional trust? The risks of climate change are illustrious and widely accepted, yet responses on an individual level are also largely inadequate. This research looks to further investigate types of trust, risk perception of climate change, and their interaction to build a greater understanding of whether a social trap (Rothstein, 2005) – where an absence of trust can overwhelm an individuals' risk perception and result in minimal action despite knowing the dangers of no action – exists and where it is more prevalent. Presence of the social trap will be analysed for willingness to act in favour of climate change mitigation as well as attitude (acceptance) of different types of renewable energy forms. Using probit models with cross-sectional survey data on four developed European countries (UK, France, Germany, and Norway), we find evidence of the social trap in the aggregated data model, which highlights the importance of social trust regarding willingness to act in favour of climate mitigation as there is a high probability of action regardless of risk perception of climate change when social trust is high. In contrast, the same is not true for renewables, as interactions were mainly insignificant, although there were interesting findings involving institutional trust, gender, and country specific results for particular renewables.

Keywords : climate risk, renewables, risk perception, social trap, trust, willingness to act
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