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Research article

Psychological well-being and environmental identity: A cross-cultural study of young adults in Russia and France

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Abstract

Introduction. Contemporary society faces escalating environmental challenges, yet existing research lacks a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between psychological well-being, environmental identity, and value orientations across cultures. This study investigates these relationships among young adults in Russia and France using quantitative survey methods and statistical analysis.

Materials and Methods. The study involved a sample of young adults aged 19 to 34 from Russia and France (N = 109). Data were collected via an online survey that incorporated standardized measures: Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale, Clayton's Environmental Identity Scale, and Schwartz's Value Survey. Correlation and regression analyses were employed to identify cross-cultural differences and relationships between variables.

Results. The study revealed significant cross-cultural differences in psychological well-being and value orientations. Russian participants scored higher in overall psychological well-being, autonomy, environmental mastery, and personal growth. No significant differences were found in environmental identity levels between groups. Universalism and conformity exhibited consistent associations with environmental identity across nationalities, underscoring their universal role in fostering pro-environmental behavior. Conversely, power-related values correlated negatively with environmental identity in France but positively in Russia. These findings provide insights into how cultural values influence environmental identity and psychological well-being.

Conclusion. The results hold implications for designing culturally tailored environmental education programs and enhancing well-being of young adults across diverse sociocultural contexts. They underscore the necessity of accounting for cultural background in interventions targeting environmental identity and psychological health. Future research should further explore the role of social norms and policy frameworks in pro-environmental behavior and psychological resilience in young populations.

Keywords: psychological well-being, environmental identity, value orientations, pro-environmental behavior, cultural differences, environmental education

Научная статья

Психологическое благополучие и идентичность с природой: кросскультурное исследование молодежи России и Франции

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Аннотация

Введение. В условиях экологических вызовов перспективно изучение взаимодействия психологического благополучия, экологической идентичности и ценностных ориентаций в разных культурных контекстах. В статье рассматриваются связи между психологическим благополучием, идентичностью с природой и ценностными ориентациями у молодежи России и Франции.

Материалы и методы. В исследовании приняли участие 109 человек из России и Франции в возрасте от 19 до 34 лет. Данные собирались с помощью онлайн-опросников, использовались «Шкала психологического благополучия» К. Рифф, «Шкала природной идентичности» С. Клэйтон и опросник ценностных ориентаций Ш. Шварца. Для выявления кросскультурных различий применялся корреляционный и регрессионный анализ.

Результаты. В исследовании установлены значимые кросскультурные различия в психологическом благополучии и ценностных ориентациях среди молодежи России и Франции. Российская выборка продемонстрировала значимо более высокие оценки по шкалам «Позитивные отношения», «Автономия», «Управление средой», «Личностный рост» и по интегральной шкале психологического благополучия. Значимых различий в уровне идентичности с природой между выборками не наблюдается. Универсализм и конформность демонстрируют устойчивую связь с идентичностью с природой вне зависимости от национальной принадлежности, что подчеркивает их универсальную роль в формировании экологически ответственного поведения. Напротив, ценностные ориентации, связанные с властью, показали отрицательную взаимосвязь с выраженностью природной идентичности во Франции и положительную — в России.

Заключение. Обнаруженные различия могут быть использованы при построении программ экологического образования, что станет важным ресурсом для сохранения психологического благополучия молодежи и всего общества. Обнаруженные различия показывают роль культурного контекста в формировании идентичности с природой и правильного отношения к природной среде, что необходимо учитывать при адаптации образовательных программ других стран. Необходимо продолжать исследования взаимодействия природной идентичности с ценностными ориентациями, экологическим сознанием и социальными нормами в различных социокультурных контекстах, не ограничиваясь только молодежью, чтобы углубить понимание влияния культурных факторов на экологическое поведение и благополучие людей в разных странах.

Ключевые слова: психологическое благополучие, идентичность с природой, ценностные ориентации, экологически ответственное поведение, культурные различия, экологическое образование

Introduction

The modern world is undergoing rapid socio-economic transformations that reshape human-nature relationships, value systems, and psychological well-being. Increasing urbanization, technological advancement, and environmental degradation underscore the urgency of studying

factors that influence perceptions of nature and its significance. This is especially relevant for young adults who both shape societal futures and bear the brunt of contemporary challenges.

The interplay between psychological well-being, environmental identity, and value orientations is a complex, culturally mediated process. Russia and France — divergent in historical trajectories,

cultural norms, and ecological contexts — offer a compelling comparative framework for analyzing these dynamics.

This study aims to identify cross-cultural differences in environmental identity, psychological well-being, and value orientations among young adults from Russia and France.

Contemporary research conceptualizes well-being through two primary lenses: hedonic (subjective) and eudaimonic (psychological) well-being. The hedonic model emphasizes affective states and cognitive life evaluations, such as joy and life satisfaction, with emotional balance as a core metric. In contrast, C. Ryff's eudaimonic framework comprises six dimensions: autonomy, personal growth, environmental mastery, positive relationships, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. These components reflect the realization of personal potential and a meaningful existence. Ryff's model posits that psychological well-being hinges not merely on positive affect but on self-actualization and adaptive stress management (Ryff 2013).

Cultural, social, and political contexts engender distinct value hierarchies that modulate conceptions of well-being. Economically developed nations typically report higher well-being (Diener, Tay 2015; Helliwell et al. 2021). Societal structure further dictates well-being priorities: collectivist cultures (e. g., Japan, China) emphasize social cohesion, whereas individualistic societies (e. g., the U.S., U.K.) prioritize personal achievement and self-determination (Hofstede et al. 2010). Democratic institutions also correlate with enhanced well-being by fostering economic stability and social security (Inglehart, Baker 2000).

Psychological well-being is inextricably linked to human-nature interactions, which exert profound environmental and psychological effects. Though long neglected, the mid to late 20th century's ecological crises and increasing urbanization spurred scholarly interest in nature's role. Relevant studies were pioneered by R. Kaplan and P. Schultz who conducted systemic research on nature's impact on well-being, identity, and behavior, laying groundwork for ecological psychology.

Kaplan's research established nature as a catalyst for psychological restoration, demonstrating its capacity to alleviate stress and engender existential meaning (Kaplan, Kaplan 1982; 1989). Schultz expanded this paradigm, proposing a tripartite (cognitive, emotional, behavioral) model of human-nature engagement. His work revealed that individuals who integrate nature into their identity exhibit stronger pro-environmental behaviors, whereas ecological disconnection predicts exploitative attitudes (Schultz 2002).

Another contribution was made by S. Clayton, who advanced the conceptualization of environmental identity, framing it as a core facet of self-perception. Her research demonstrated that nature serves not merely as a contributor to emotional well-being but as a fundamental component of personal identity, shaping value orientations and environmental behaviors. Environmental identity governs individuals' self-conception in relation to the natural world, emerging through personal narratives, emotional bonds, and perceived interconnectedness with the environment. This connection informs worldview construction and behavioral patterns, including the internalization of nature's significance and its integration into self-concept. Clayton's model positions environmental identity as intrinsically tied to nature-related affective ties, rendering it particularly relevant for psychological well-being research (Clayton 2003).

The examination of values is paramount for understanding human behavior and nature interactions. As foundational cognitive schemas, values function as guiding principles that influence attitudes, decisions, and social engagements across life domains. A seminal work by S. Schwartz established values as trans-situational goals that direct human conduct (Schwartz 2006). Values exhibit three defining attributes: (1) motivational basis, representing the drive to fulfil fundamental needs; (2) cross-cultural universality, though with culture-dependent prioritization; and (3) hierarchical organization, creating distinctive individual and societal value profiles. Schwartz's framework elucidates how values configure both personal and collective identities while predicting individual and group behaviors (Sagiv, Schwartz 2022).

The intersection between Schwartz's value typology and Clayton's nature engagement continuum presents compelling implications for environmental psychology. Value orientations differentially modulate nature relations: people focused on self-expression and personal development associate nature with creativity and inspiration, whereas those with a focus on power and influences are more likely to simply exploit natural resources (Clayton et al. 2021).

These theoretical constructs intersect through their joint influence on behavioral patterns and phenomenological experience. Cultural contexts mould value hierarchies, which subsequently mediate both nature engagement and psychological well-being. The reported study employs this integrated framework to investigate cross-cultural variations in these dynamic relationships.

Materials and methods

The study sample consisted of young adults aged 19 to 34 years (mean age 24.8 years, standard deviation 4.2 years) holding Russian or French citizenship. A total of 109 respondents participated, including 47 Russians (20 men, 27 women) and 62 French participants (25 men, 37 women). Data collection was carried out online via the Google Forms platform for both Russian and French participants. Russian respondents were recruited using a network-based approach, with invitations distributed through the Internet. French respondents were recruited through the Survey-Circle platform.

The study explored how environmental identity, value orientations, and psychological well-being are interconnected among respondents from Russia and France. The hypothesis proposed that the relationships between these factors would differ between Russian and French participants. Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale assessed current well-being levels and component strengths. The scale evaluates psychological well-being at specific life stages. The Russian version of the methodology was adapted by T. Shevelenkova and T. Fesenko (Shevelenkova, Fesenko 2005), while the French version was developed by L. Bouffard and S. Lapierre (Bouffard, Lapierre 1997). The methodology includes six subscales; however, this article focuses on the composite score.

The Environmental Identity Scale (EID) by (Clayton 2003) measured nature identification. This 24-item questionnaire uses a 5-point Likert scale (1 = 'Strongly disagree' to 5 = 'Strongly agree') to assess connection to natural environments and nature's role in self-concept. We employed the Russian adaptation by B. Irkhin and S. Nartova-Bochaver (Clayton et al. 2019).

Schwartz's Value Survey (Karandashev 2004) evaluated personal value systems. The 57-item instrument contains noun and adjective sections assessing ten value dimensions: hedonism, achievement, power, self-direction, stimulation, conformity, benevolence, tradition, security, and universalism. Participants rated items on a 9-point scale (from 7 (of supreme importance) to -1 (opposed to my values)). The French version of the questionnaire was adapted by Schwartz (Schwartz 1992).

Results and discussion

The study is based on descriptive and comparative analyses of environmental identity, psychological well-being, and value orientation scales. We examined individual components of psychological

well-being and value orientations to explore cross-cultural differences in greater detail.

As presented in Table 1, several Psychological Well-being Scale variables showed significant variability among participants ($SD > 8$ points), suggesting assessment inconsistency. For instance, purpose in life (Russian: 59.32 ± 8.77 ; French: 58.26 ± 9.92) and self-acceptance (Russian: 56.77 ± 11.11 ; French: 56.26 ± 11.44) scores demonstrated substantial variability, potentially reflecting individual differences in trait expression. Conversely, some variables exhibited relatively low standard deviations, indicating more consistent participant responses. Personal growth (Russian: 63.93 ± 6.67 ; French: 49.39 ± 4.02) and environmental mastery (Russian: 56.73 ± 7.67 ; French: 44.45 ± 5.23) showed limited variability, suggesting more stable perceptions of these personality aspects.

For comparative analysis, we employed the Shapiro-Wilk test. As most subscales violated normality assumptions ($p < 0.05$, rejecting H_0 of normal distribution), we compared variables using the Mann-Whitney U test.

Figure 1 reflects the key cross-cultural differences in psychological well-being (Fig. 1). Russian participants scored significantly higher on positive relationships ($p < 0.05$), autonomy ($p < 0.001$), environmental mastery ($p < 0.001$), personal growth ($p < 0.001$), and composite psychological well-being ($p < 0.001$). These findings may reflect strengthened interpersonal relationships and greater emphasis on environmental competence in Russian society. No significant differences emerged for purpose in life or self-acceptance.

The results reveal distinct psychological well-being perceptions between Russian and French young adults. Elevated Russian scores in autonomy and environmental mastery may indicate stronger cultural emphasis on personal achievement and responsibility. The absence of differences in purpose in life and self-acceptance suggests these dimensions may represent more universal aspects of well-being, less influenced by cultural context.

Significant between-group differences emerged for several value dimensions: conformity ($p < 0.01$), tradition ($p < 0.001$), benevolence ($p < 0.01$), universalism ($p < 0.01$), and stimulation ($p < 0.01$), with French participants consistently rating these values higher than their Russian counterparts. No significant differences were observed for self-direction, hedonism, achievement, power, or security values (see Fig. 2). Notably, environmental identity scores showed no significant cross-cultural differences, supporting the theoretical proposition that nature identification represents a universal component of self-concept relatively independent of cultural context.

Table 1. Mean scores and variability of psychological well-being, value orientations, and environmental identity scales across Russian and French samples

Variables	Whole sample	Russia	France	U-test
	M ± sd			(p)
Psychological well-being				
Positive relationships	56.04 ± 7.65	58.22 ± 9.98	54.60 ± 5.23	1111.5*
Autonomy	51.21 ± 7.98	57.10 ± 8.34	47.32 ± 4.71	425.0***
Environmental mastery	49.34 ± 8.72	56.73 ± 7.67	44.45 ± 5.23	322.0***
Personal growth	55.17 ± 8.85	63.93 ± 6.67	49.39 ± 4.02	80.0***
Purpose in life	58.68 ± 9.45	59.32 ± 8.77	58.26 ± 9.92	1405.5
Self-acceptance	56.77 ± 11.11	57.54 ± 10.69	56.26 ± 11.44	1381.0
Psychological well-being	327.21 ± 36.90	352.83 ± 39.23	310.27 ± 23.13	511.5***
Environmental identity				
Environmental identity	59.84 ± 12.67	59.85 ± 12.60	59.84 ± 12.81	1474.0
Value orientations				
Conformity	3.19 ± 1.11	2.78 ± 1.03	3.45 ± 1.09	1988.5**
Tradition	3.11 ± 1.53	2.27 ± 1.37	3.66 ± 1.38	2214.5***
Benevolence	4.99 ± 1.05	4.57 ± 1.06	5.27 ± 0.96	1917.5**
Universalism	4.99 ± 1.15	4.58 ± 1.16	5.25 ± 1.08	1952.5**
Self-direction	5.34 ± 1.00	5.18 ± 0.88	5.45 ± 1.07	1697.0
Stimulation	4.35 ± 1.58	3.80 ± 1.46	4.71 ± 1.56	1927.0**
Hedonism	4.99 ± 1.32	4.84 ± 1.39	5.09 ± 1.27	1590.0
Achievement	4.27 ± 1.31	4.20 ± 1.19	4.31 ± 1.38	1532.0
Power	2.70 ± 1.62	2.67 ± 1.70	2.71 ± 1.58	1463.0
Security	4.48 ± 1.30	4.21 ± 0.96	4.66 ± 1.47	1767.0

Note: $p < 0.05^*$, $p < 0.01^{**}$, $p < 0.001^{***}$.

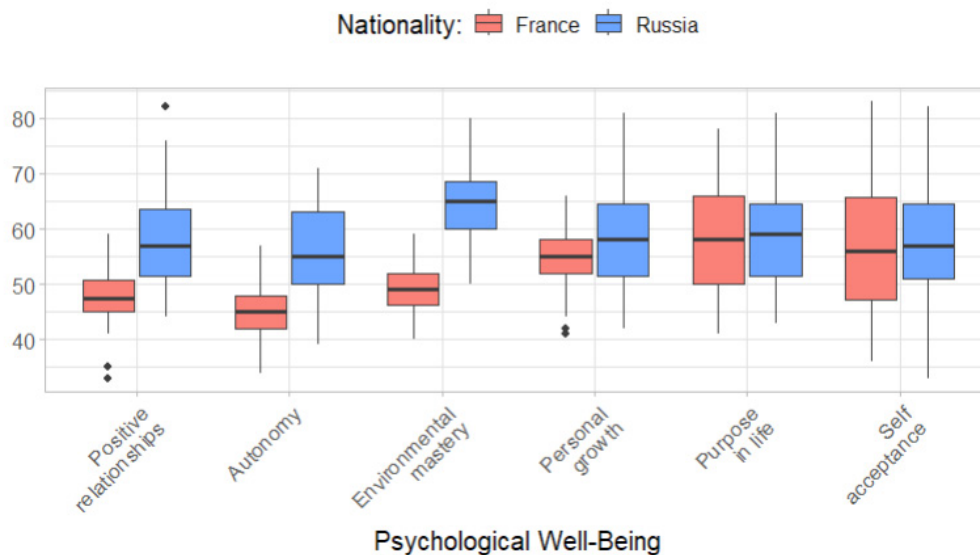


Fig. 1. Comparison of psychological well-being components between Russian and French young adults (boxplots)

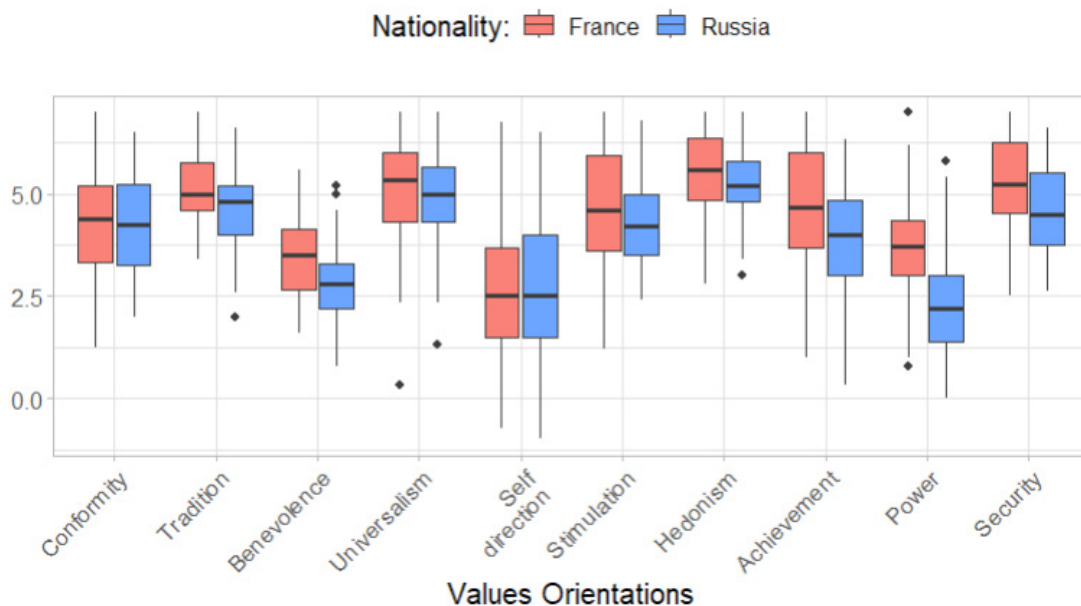


Fig. 2. Comparison of value orientations between Russian and French young adults (boxplots)

Subsequently, we performed Spearman's rank-order correlation analyses on separated national samples, generating distinct correlation matrices for each group. To further examine predictors of environmental identity, we conducted regression analyses (Table 2). In the Russian sample, environmental identity correlates positively with the value orientations of universalism (0.43) and security (0.46). The French sample revealed associations between environmental identity and conformism

(0.27), tradition (0.29), benevolence (0.47), and universalism (0.49). Notably, environmental identity correlated exclusively with value orientations in both groups, showing no significant relationships with psychological well-being dimensions. Universalism and self-acceptance emerged as central nodes in the Russian sample, demonstrating additional associations with positive relationships (0.31), personal growth (0.39), and environmental identity (0.43) (see Fig. 3).

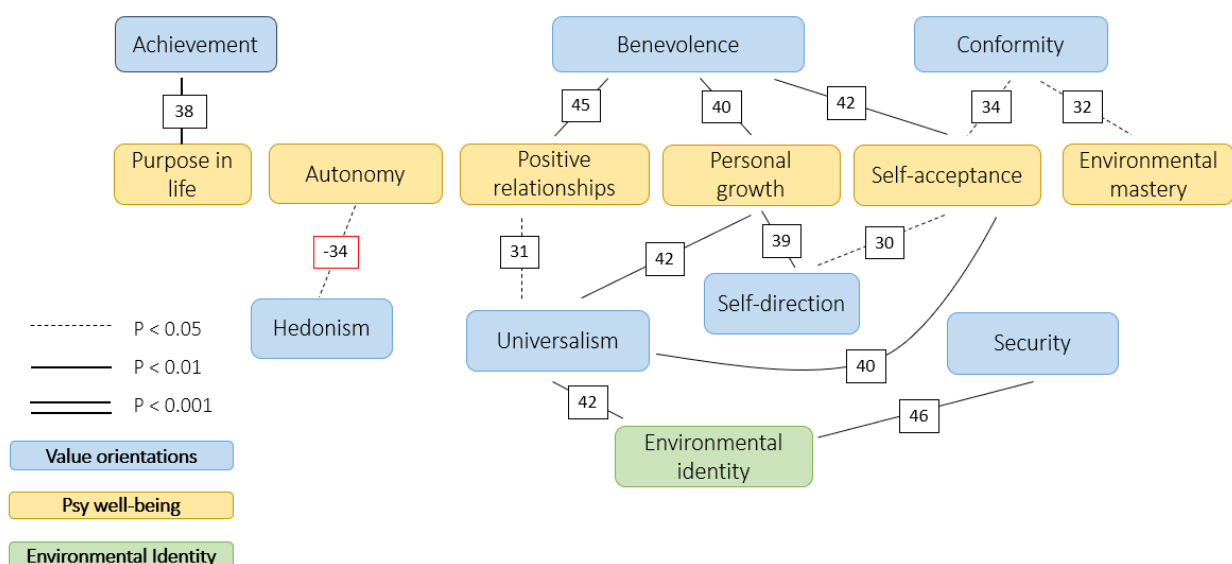


Fig. 3. Correlation patterns for the Russian sample

Analysis of the French sample revealed more extensive interrelationships among variables. Thus, self-acceptance correlates positively with traditions (0.26), benevolence (0.35), universalism (0.32), personal growth (0.41), stimulation (0.29), hedonism (0.28), achievements (0.26) and security (0.32); personal growth showed significant associations with well-being scales of environmental mastery (–0.50), positive relationships (0.35), and purpose in life (0.37). Universalism emerged as a central connecting node, mirroring findings from the Russian sample, with significant relationships to four psychological well-being subscales (see Fig. 4).

The observed differences in correlations between value orientations and psychological well-being across the two samples likely reflect distinct cultural characteristics and socio-cultural influences on well-being, environmental identity, and value formation.

To investigate these relationships further, we conducted a regression analysis to identify key factors associated with environmental identity. Using the R programming language, we constructed a linear model via the `lm` function, selected for its flexibility in accounting for both main effects and interaction terms. The initial model specification treated environmental identity as the dependent variable, with value orientations and autonomy as primary predictors, while also incorporating an interaction term between power values and nationality (Russian vs. French). Model refinement was then performed using the step function, which applies the Akaike information criterion (R Core Team 2024) to optimize the balance between model accuracy and complexity, ensuring a parsimonious yet informative final model. The resulting model is presented in Table 2, while Figure 5 provides a visual representation

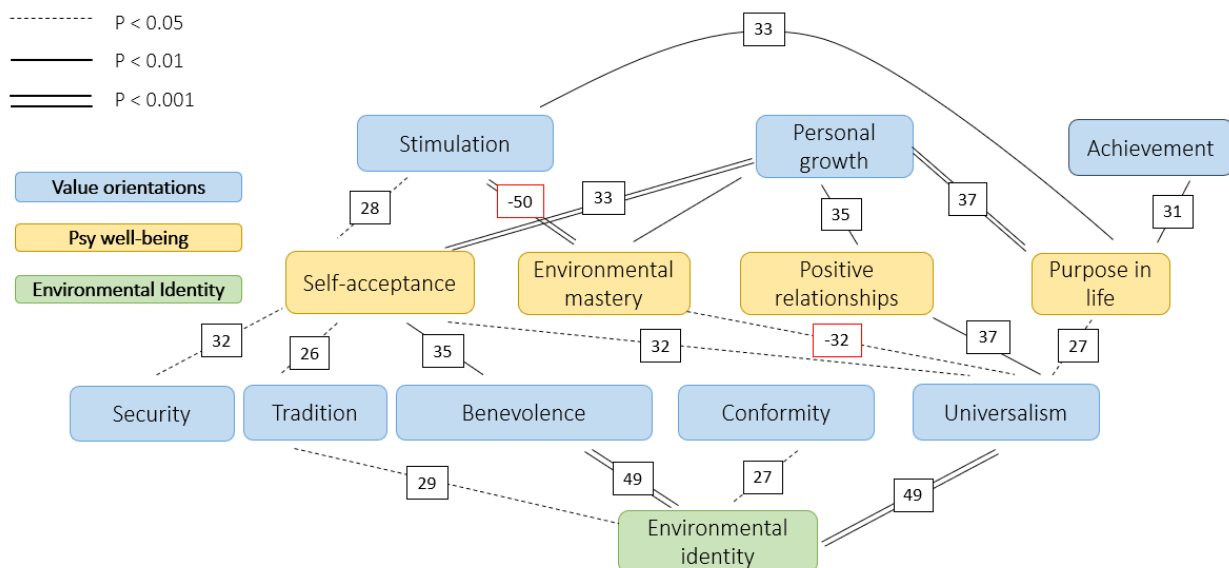


Fig. 4. Correlation patterns for the French sample

Table 2. Regression model of environmental identity, value orientations, and psychological well-being.
Note: (VO) — Value Orientations Scales; (PWB) — Psychological Well-Being Scales

Variable	Estimate	Std. Error	t-value	p-value	
(Intercept)	49.05	8.79	5.58	< 0.001	***
Universalism (VO)	4.33	1.08	4.02	< 0.001	***
Power (VO)	-2.67	0.89	-3.00	0.003	**
Conformity (VO)	3.03	1.31	2.31	0.023	*
Autonomy (PWB)	-0.32	0.14	-2.28	0.024	*
Power: Russia (VO)	2.91	0.82	3.53	0.001	***

$p < 0.05^*$, $p < 0.01^{**}$, $p < 0.001^{***}$
 Residual standard error: 10.85 on 103 degrees of freedom
 Multiple R-squared: 0.2962, adjusted R-squared: 0.262
 F-statistic: 8.669 on 5 and 103 DF, $p < 0.001$

of the key predictors and their relationships within the model.

The regression model reveals that most significant predictors are value-related indicators, with only one factor linked to psychological well-being. Both universalism and conformity demonstrate statistically significant positive associations with environmental identity. Participants who prioritize universalistic values — emphasizing equal rights, social justice, and concern for others' welfare — show stronger nature connectedness. This relationship likely stems from universalism's inherent inclusion of environmental protection as an extension of its ethical principles regarding care for all beings. People who value universal principles of justice and care tend to identify with values that support the preservation and protection of the environment.

Notably, the universalism-environmental identity relationship maintains consistent strength across both cultural samples, suggesting the universality of this value orientation in different cultures. The conformity may reflect individuals' tendency to internalize and act upon socially endorsed environmental norms.

The power dimension shows a theoretically expected negative association with environmental identity, suggesting status-seeking motivations may hinder ecological values. However, this relationship reverses positively in the Russian context, potentially reflecting cultural interpretations of power

as stewardship of collective natural resources. The Russian pattern implies that power values in this context might incorporate elements of environmental responsibility, though the precise mechanisms warrant further investigation. The model accounts for 26% of environmental identity variance, suggesting that while value orientations and autonomy are significant predictors, additional factors influence this complex construct. Results confirm universalism and conformity as consistent positive predictors across cultures, whereas strong autonomy and power values (except in the Russian context) typically inhibit environmental identification. These findings emphasize: (1) the crucial role of cultural context in environmental identity research, (2) the need for culturally-adapted nature connection programs, and (3) the importance of investigating additional variables to better understand identity formation processes.

Summary

The findings confirm the critical role of cultural context in influencing environmental identity, psychological well-being, and value orientations. The observed differences between Russian and French young adults likely reflect distinct cultural-historical backgrounds and environmental relationships. Notably, universalism and conformity maintain consistent positive associations with

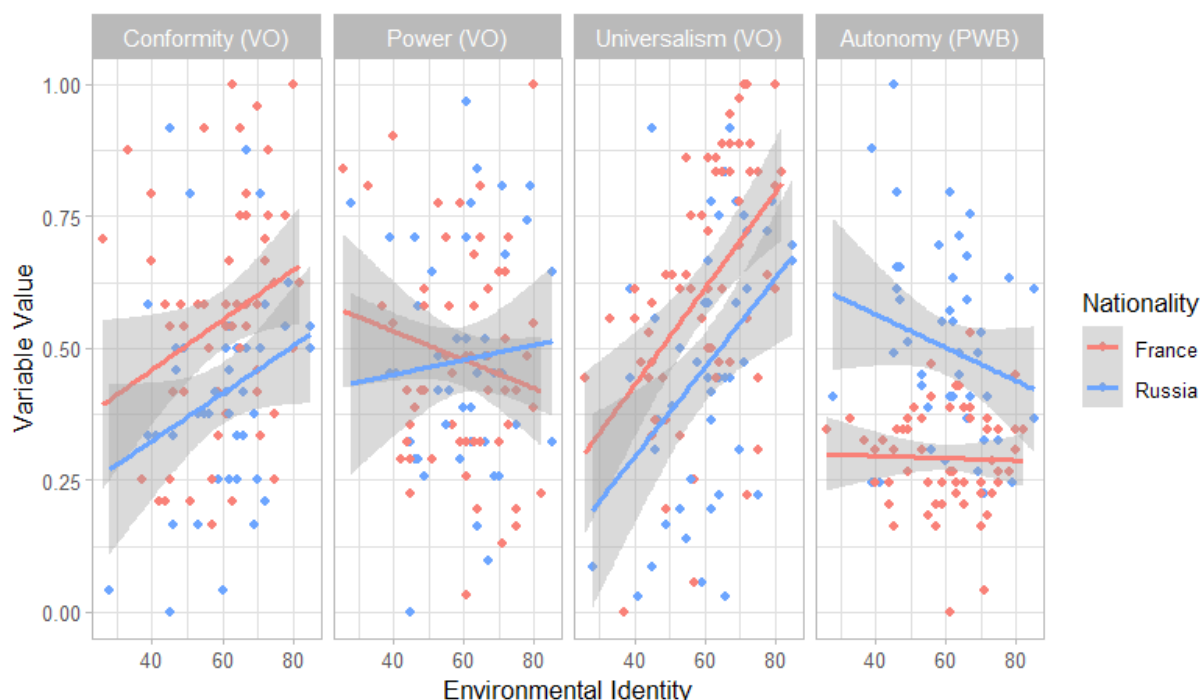


Fig. 5. Significant predictors in the environmental identity regression model. Relative contributions of Value Orientations (VO) and Psychological Well-Being (PWB) scales

environmental identity across both national groups, underscoring their universal importance in fostering pro-environmental attitudes. In contrast, power values exhibit culturally divergent relationships — showing negative associations with environmental identity in France but positive associations in Russia.

These results have important practical applications for environmental education programs targeting young adults. Incorporating universalism and conformity principles could effectively promote nature-connectedness across cultures, while culturally-tailored approaches may enhance effectiveness — emphasizing collective environmental responsibility in Russia and humanitarian ecological values in France.

While the methodological approach proved suitable for cross-cultural comparison, study limitations including sample size constraints and restricted variable range indicate important directions for future research. Subsequent research would benefit from including more diverse participant groups and employing mixed-method approaches that incorporate qualitative measures alongside quantitative assessments. Particularly promising would be examinations of how environmental identity interacts with value orientations, ecological awareness, and prevailing social norms across different cultural contexts.

Конфликт интересов

Авторы заявляют об отсутствии потенциального или явного конфликта интересов.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest, either existing or potential.

Соответствие принципам этики

Авторы сообщают, что при проведении исследования соблюдены этические принципы, предусмотренные для исследований с участием людей и животных.

Ethics Approval

The authors declare that the study complies with all ethical principles applicable to human and animal research.

Вклад авторов

Д. А. Теплова: концептуализация, сбор и первичная обработка эмпирических данных, написание первоначального текста, рецензирование и редактирование рукописи.

П. А. Яркин: концептуализация, рецензирование и редактирование рукописи.

Author Contributions

D. Teplova: Conceptualization; Data curation; Writing — original draft; Writing — review & editing.

P. Yarkin: Conceptualization; Writing — review & editing.

Заявление о доступности данных

Данные доступны по запросу, адресованному автору-корреспонденту.

Data Availability Statement

Data are available upon request to the corresponding author.

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