

Barriers to climate-conscious education choices

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Which SDG does your project relate to?



What is the concrete problem you have worked with?

The climate is changing, the temperatures are increasing and the frequency of natural disasters are increasing – even after years of research, awareness and efforts to prevent the consequences of manmade climate change. According to IPCC, it is now beyond any reasonable doubt that climate change is serious and human-induced. But this also means that humans have the possibility to act against the changes.

The youth's concern for the climate and their willingness to change their lifestyles and habits represents a great potential for the green transition, and it becomes essential to understand the youth's climate awareness. Through the choice of education, young people can develop important competencies and utilize these to contribute to the green transition. In addition, the initiative 'Green Lab Denmark' anticipates a significant shortage of skilled workers who have the competencies to realize companies' further development of green solutions.

Therefore, this thesis aims to uncover young Danes' consciousness and awareness in relation to climate change. Furthermore, it explores the extent to which understanding and knowledge regarding climate change affects their priorities in relation to educational choices and the future.

What is your conclusion and/or solution that can be applied in the 'real' world?

The analysis is divided into three sections: *Young People's Climate Awareness*, *Climate Awareness in the Choice of Education* and *Barriers to Prioritizing the Climate*. As this is a new field of study in sociological research, every section is characterized by a descriptive and exploratory nature.

The analysis is based on a combination of both quantitative and qualitative data (515 Danes aged between 14–28 years) to achieve the best possible understanding of the effects of social structures on the youth's expectations for the impact of climate change.

The thesis showed that young Danes generally are highly aware of the consequences of human induced climate change and believe these consequences will be severe. At the same time, the study shows that this awareness depends on cultural capital for example education. This is mainly due to the knowledge it requires to understand the complex and abstract phenomenon of climate change. Additionally, their knowledge relies on different sources depending on their capital, which appears to be essential for their perception of climate change and its impacts.



Despite the fact that young people show a high interest and concern in relation to the state of the climate, it is a low priority when they make decisions about education. Their preferences are far more career-oriented and focus, above all, on job security and pay. This is partly because of the risks related to employment and individualized responsibility for one's own success often come before climate risks. Another factor is that other preferences are embedded in their habitus, and it takes time to generate new and more climate-oriented preferences. While social structures generate climate awareness, alternative embedded structures maintain other preferences. Other barriers found in the study are: 'Powerlessness', 'Far in the future', 'Responsibility' and 'Complexity'.

If we want to attract young students to programs where they can acquire the skills and competencies to contribute to the sustainable development, we must consider that global and 'invisible' risks are overshadowed by the many individual-oriented concerns and expectations regarding the choice of education. The study shows a perceived conflict between sustainability and job security and payment, but is that a reality? Or does it have to be that way? Is what we are facing a structural problem needing structural solutions?

