

# **If not now, then when? Unexpected stability in climate relevant behaviours and beliefs among young Austrians after leaving high school**

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Previous research shows that constitutive biographical phases shape subsequent mobility and food consumption. After high school graduation, multiple life events coincide in a short timeframe: leaving the parental home, military/civil service, entering gainful employment, academic education. We expected that this formative phase reorients the climate relevant behaviours and beliefs of young adults in Austria.

High school students were surveyed during their final high school year (March 2020, t1), and one year later (April 2021, t2). The sample decreased from n=502 at t1 to a longitudinal sample of n=165 at t2. A standardized questionnaire assessed a range of behaviours (e.g., diet, energy consumption, mobility, public engagement), personal and societal norms, and efficacy beliefs (self, participatory, collective, affective).

We observe virtually no change from t1 to t2. T-tests show minimal change in factor means. Mean change is not moderated by the occurrence of life events. However, if students relocate, transport mode choice shifts to cycling and walking. Autoregressive cross-lagged models show high stability over time, but cannot discern causal direction between factors.

We can exclude several reasons for this overall null finding. The multi-item scales feature measurement invariance over time. Similar sample distribution in both survey waves by socio-economic status of parents and by gender precludes self-selection bias. Participants indeed experienced multiple life events, despite the COVID19 pandemic restrictions, and rated the pandemic's influence on their life course fairly low. Selected  $p < .05$  results have minimal effect sizes and seem to come from cumulative alpha error. However, the small longitudinal sample lacks statistical power.

Online focus groups with selected participants in May 2022 shall explore potential reasons for this (seemingly) total absence of change, e.g. that socialisation might be already completed by the final school year. From this, we aim to derive implications for addressing the knowledge-awareness-action gap in education for sustainable development.