

## **Governance | Individual communication**

IC - (21055) - A REMARKABLE YOUTH VOICE IN THE CLIMATE DEBATE: ANALYSING THUNBERG'S MEANING-MAKING AND CONSTRUCTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL CITIZENSHIP

Alice Fonseca<sup>1</sup>; Paula Castro<sup>1,2</sup>

1 - ISCTE - IUL | University Institute of Lisbon; 2 - CIS-IUL - Centre for Social Research and Intervention

### **Background and objectives**

Aiming to contribute for a better understanding of the climate change (CC) debate, and in particular of how young activists are constructing the “good environmental citizen”, this study explores the meaning-making patterns that structure Greta Thunberg’s message, as she is a remarkable youth voice in the global CC debate and a pivotal young activist figure.

### **Process and methods (for empirical research)**

For this, a systematic analysis of 25 of Thunberg’s speeches was conducted, drawing from an interdisciplinary approach bridging two socio-psychological perspectives – Social Representations theory (SRT) and Stereotype Content Model (SCM) – with the literature on green citizenship. The analysis aimed to identify: (1) the central meaning oppositions (*themata*) Thunberg uses for making sense of CC; (2) how she values/devalues different CC actors with the traits of the two SCM’s dimensions (warmth and competence); (3) to identify the kind of environmental citizenship (e.g., action in the public *versus* private sphere; focus on individual rights *versus* collective responsibilities; focus on the national *versus* global scale) she constructs.

### **Main results (or main arguments in the case of critical reviews)**

Findings show how Thunberg’s unyieldingly focuses on calling for (transformative) collective action in the public sphere, devaluing today’s “leaders” as cold and incompetent and valuing “youth” and “public” as competent climate actors, against usual stereotypes. Moving past a focus on individual rights, Thunberg emphasizes duties (to a global collective), constructing an active green citizenship aligned with a “strong sustainability” approach.

### **Implications for research and practice/policy | Importance and originality of the contribution**

By integrating psychology and the literature on green citizenship, we show how Thunberg’s speeches have implications for the affirmation of youth voices: the young good environmental citizens she constructs are competent, agentic and focused on public action for collective transformation. This opens space for a more serious uptake of young people’s voices from public authorities and supports young people’s self-confidence.

**Palavras-chave : climate change, activism, youth, environmental citizenship, social psychology, meaning-making**