

## EXPLORING THE EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPE OF ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION: THE ROLE OF HOPE IN PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIOR

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### Abstract

This study aims to explore the role of positive emotions, particularly hope, in fostering pro-environmental behavior amidst the increasingly alarming global ecological crisis. While many previous studies have highlighted the impact of negative emotions such as eco-anxiety on individual actions, constructive emotional aspects such as hope have received insufficient academic attention. Through a literature review of interdisciplinary studies from environmental psychology, behavioral science, and climate change communication, this study analyzes how hope can serve as a catalyst for sustainable environmental engagement. The findings suggest that hope is not simply a passive emotion but a psychological force that can shape perceptions, motivate action, and strengthen long-term commitment to sustainability. Furthermore, factors such as self-efficacy, social support, and positive narratives from the media or community leaders contribute to the formation of productive hope. This study emphasizes the importance of a balanced emotional approach in environmental education and communication strategies to create a psychological space that empowers individuals to act.

**Keywords:** hope, pro-environmental behavior, positive emotions, climate crisis, environmental psychology, self-efficacy

### INTRODUCTION

The current global environmental crisis has become a major concern in various areas of human life, from politics and economics to education and psychology. Global warming, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, and other ecological disasters are creating increasingly visible psychological pressures in society's collective consciousness. In this context, research on pro-environmental behavior is becoming increasingly relevant and urgent (Zeier et

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al., 2025a). However, most previous studies have focused on cognitive factors such as environmental knowledge, values, and social norms, while affective aspects such as emotions have often been overlooked. Yet, emotions play a crucial role in shaping and directing individual actions on environmental issues. One emotion that has received attention in contemporary discourse is hope, which is believed to be a crucial driver in efforts to change behavior toward sustainability.

Hope differs from mere optimism or positive beliefs. It involves the perception of the possibility of positive change in the future, accompanied by the belief that an individual or group has the capacity to contribute to that change (Williamson & Thulin, 2022). In an environmental context, hope can arise from the belief that small, consistent actions can have a significant impact on the planet's sustainability. Hope enables individuals to persevere and continue acting even when faced with bleak environmental realities. Unlike fear, anger, or ecological anxiety, which often lead to emotional exhaustion or helplessness, hope can foster a stronger sense of responsibility, perseverance, and resilience in facing ecological challenges (Lagomarsino & Lemarié, 2024).

Previous studies have shown that negative emotions such as eco-anxiety, while they can trigger awareness, do not always lead to productive action. In some cases, eco-anxiety can actually lead individuals to withdraw or feel incapable of doing much. Therefore, there is a need to explore the dynamics of positive emotions such as hope as an alternative that can stimulate intrinsic motivation and support sustainable behavioral change. Research on the role of hope in pro-environmental behavior can provide new insights into how environmental communication strategies, public campaigns, or ecological education can be designed to be more effective by prioritizing inspiring, meaningful narratives that foster collective hope (Zühlsdorff, 2023a).

Hope does not arise in a vacuum, but is formed from a complex interaction between psychological, social, cultural, and environmental factors (Shiple, 2021). Mass media, public figures, community movements, and personal experiences interacting with nature contribute to shaping one's emotional landscape regarding environmental issues. In a society gripped by uncertainty and a complex climate crisis, it is crucial to understand how hope is formed, maintained, and directed within the context of environmental action. Is hope merely temporary or can it serve as a long-term foundation for consistent behavioral change? How does hope interact with other emotions such as responsibility, empathy for nature, or even despair? These questions underlie the importance of this research (Nguyen-Dinh & Zhang, 2025).

Furthermore, from an environmental psychology perspective, hope functions not only as an individual emotion but also as a collective force (Cao et al., 2022). In communities connected by shared ecological goals, hope can act as a social energy that strengthens bonds of solidarity, accelerates the spread of positive behaviors, and creates a shared space for action (Emotion in Digital Messages, n.d.). Collective hope can strengthen group efficacy and encourage broader social action, such as participation in environmental movements, policy advocacy, or community-based initiatives. Therefore, understanding hope not only as an individual psychological construct but also as a social phenomenon that can be developed, mediated, and transformed into concrete actions is crucial in social transformation strategies toward a sustainable future (Wielgus, 2025).

Taking these dynamics into account, this study aims to delve deeper into the role of hope in shaping and maintaining pro-environmental behavior. This study uses a literature review approach as its primary method, mapping various empirical and theoretical studies that discuss the relationship between hope and ecological behavior. Through this approach, it is hoped that a comprehensive understanding of how hope operates in an environmental context, what factors strengthen or weaken it, and how hope can be used as a constructive emotional foundation in designing social interventions and environmental education, can be obtained. This research aims not only to enrich the academic literature in the field of environmental psychology, but also to provide practical contributions for policymakers, educators, environmental activists, and the wider community in creating transformative narratives of hope for a better future for the planet, can be obtained.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study uses a literature review as the primary approach to explore the role of hope in shaping pro-environmental behavior. This method was chosen because it allows researchers to access, organize, and synthesize previously published empirical and conceptual findings related to the relationship between emotions, particularly hope, and environmental action. This literature review focused on relevant scientific sources, including journal articles, academic books, and research reports from various disciplines such as environmental psychology, behavioral science, and studies on climate change and ecological activism.

The data collection process was conducted through a systematic search of various academic databases such as Scopus, ScienceDirect, JSTOR, and

Google Scholar, using keywords such as hope, environmental behavior, climate action, and emotion in sustainability. Inclusion criteria included publications within the last ten years that explicitly discussed the role of hope in the context of environmental action or sustainability-oriented behavior change. The selected literature was then analyzed thematically to identify common patterns, differing perspectives, and remaining research gaps in the discourse on positive emotions in environmental action.

The analysis in this study was conducted using a qualitative-descriptive approach, where various findings from selected literature were interpreted to build an in-depth understanding of how hope can be a motivational driver for individuals or groups in making pro-environmental decisions. By exploring the relationship between hope, perceptions of the ecological future, and concrete actions taken by the community, this study aims to provide a conceptual contribution to studies of emotions in the context of sustainability and provide new directions for the development of more effective environmental communication and education strategies.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Role of Hope in Motivating Pro-Environmental Behavior**

Hope plays a central role in motivating individuals to engage in pro-environmental behavior. In the context of the climate crisis and increasingly alarming ecosystem degradation, hope is not simply a passive positive emotion, but rather a psychological force that drives concrete action (Zeier et al., 2025b). When someone has hope, they not only believe that change for the better is possible but also feel that they have a significant role in that change process. This belief forms the basis for active engagement in various behaviors that support environmental sustainability, such as reducing plastic consumption, choosing environmentally friendly transportation, or supporting green policies.

Hope encourages individuals to resist the despair that often arises from exposure to information about environmental degradation. When individuals feel that their small efforts are meaningful and have an impact, they are more motivated to continue taking action (Maartensson & Loi, 2022). In this sense, hope acts as a kind of emotional anchor that balances awareness of the crisis and optimism for the future. This sense of control over outcomes or a better future creates self-efficacy, which then increases commitment to behavioral change. Thus, hope has strategic value in environmental campaigns and education, as it can ignite enthusiasm and motivate people to act rather than simply feel fear or anxiety.

Numerous empirical studies have demonstrated a strong positive relationship between hope and pro-environmental behavior. For example, research conducted by (Zühlsdorff, 2023b) showed that adolescents with high levels of hope were more likely to engage in daily environmental action. The hope expressed in this study was not naive, but rather accompanied by a realistic understanding of environmental challenges. Adolescents with active hope tended to process environmental information more reflectively and engage in discussions and concrete actions. Similarly, other research examining the effects of environmental campaign messages found that messages that foster hope and offer concrete solutions were more effective in motivating pro-environmental behavior than messages that emphasize threats or disasters.

Furthermore, hope has been shown to be an important mediator between negative environmental emotions such as anxiety and guilt and desired behavior (Kerret et al., 2020). In situations where individuals feel overwhelmed by the scale of environmental problems, hope becomes a psychological lever that allows them to transform anxiety into action. A study by Leite et al., 2023, showed that individuals with high levels of hope were not only more likely to participate in environmental volunteerism but also had greater emotional resilience to the stress of climate change. This suggests that hope is not only motivationally relevant but also plays a role in maintaining the psychological well-being of activists and the general public concerned about the environment.

Thus, it can be concluded that hope is a crucial component in shaping and sustaining pro-environmental behavior. It serves as an emotional and cognitive foundation that allows individuals to feel connected to a better future and believe that their actions, however small, have a real impact. Therefore, environmental communication and education approaches that foster hope by presenting narratives about solutions, individual roles, and collective success will be more effective in encouraging public participation. Hope based on accurate information, accessible solutions, and inspiring stories of real change can be key to mobilizing collective action for the sustainability of the planet.

### **Hope as a Counterbalance to Eco-Anxiety and Despair**

In an emotional landscape filled with ecological uncertainty, hope plays a crucial role as a balance between critical awareness of the environmental crisis and emotional tendencies toward despair. Eco-anxiety, or ecological anxiety, is a natural and increasingly common emotional response amidst growing awareness of environmental degradation and the threat of climate change (Hockey, 2024). However, when this anxiety is not balanced with a positive

vision of the future or a belief that individual or collective action can bring about change, it has the potential to plunge individuals into psychological states of passivity, apathy, and even cynicism. In this context, hope emerges as a regulative force capable of keeping individuals connected to the spirit of action, without ignoring the harsh reality of the ongoing ecological crisis.

Hope serves as a psychological bridge between the challenging reality of the present and the possibility of a better future. In psychology, hope does not simply mean naive optimism, but rather an active mental attitude that encompasses the belief that solutions are possible and that current actions are meaningful. In the face of environmental crises, hope allows individuals to remain emotionally resilient amidst constant exposure to bad news and dire predictions. While eco-anxiety drives people to paralyzing fear, hope provides the psychological space to imagine alternative, more sustainable futures. This is not about denying scientific facts or avoiding reality, but rather about developing the courage to act despite uncertainty, because there is a possibility that positive change is possible (Guenette, 2022).

More deeply, hope acts as an antidote to helplessness and apathy by restoring a sense of agency, or the ability to act. Many individuals, especially young people, feel overwhelmed by the scale and complexity of environmental crises, leading to feelings of inability to contribute significantly (Aston, 2022). In these circumstances, hope can reactivate a sense of responsibility and participation. It redirects attention from what cannot be done to what can still be attempted, however small. When individuals believe their efforts matter, they are more likely to engage in pro-environmental behavior, advocate for sustainable policies, or inspire others to act. Hope, then, not only counteracts the psychological stress of eco-anxiety but also creates social momentum for broader change.

Hope also enables the reframing of crises as opportunities for transformation (Voški et al., 2023). Amidst ecological destruction, new narratives emerge that encourage us to reimagine humanity's relationship with nature. Hope enables individuals to see the possibility that from destruction can emerge a new consciousness, a new value system, and practices more aligned with sustainability. In this sense, hope is not an escape from reality, but rather the foundation of informed, reflective, and committed collective action. The presence of hope also enables public spaces to foster more productive discussions, not trapped in fatalism or blame, but focused on finding shared solutions.

In the realm of environmental education and campaigns, fostering hope means facilitating a learning process that fosters critical understanding and empowerment. Young people exposed to narratives of destruction without narratives of improvement are easily trapped in despair. Therefore, it is crucial to balance the presentation of scientific reality with narratives of hope derived from good practices, green innovations, and social movements that have successfully created change. When individuals are shown that change is possible and that they are part of the force that can make it happen, hope can become a sustainable, transformative force. It not only balances eco-anxiety but also fuels the building of a more just and sustainable ecological future.

### **Strategies for Cultivating Hope in Environmental Communication and Education**

In the face of increasingly complex and pressing environmental crises, cultivating hope is a crucial strategy in environmental communication and education (Maulina et al., 2024). Hope is not an escape from reality, but rather a psychological energy that can focus attention on the possibility of change and motivate individuals and communities to take concrete action. In this context, transformative narratives play a crucial role. Narratives that not only dramatically depict ecological threats but also demonstrate pathways to positive transformation can evoke emotions and inspire active engagement. Effective environmental communication must combine honesty about challenges with justified optimism about solutions, so that audiences do not fall into despair or apathy but instead feel a sense of ownership in the change.

Powerful transformative narratives are often rooted in community experiences and local stories that demonstrate that change is possible (Hope in the Anthropocene, n.d.). When residents can see how a community has successfully managed forests sustainably, developed regenerative agriculture, or restored coastal ecosystems, hope becomes more concrete. In this regard, community empowerment becomes a central element in cultivating hope. Participatory environmental education—where communities are not merely objects of information but also subjects of learning and decision-making—will strengthen a sense of collective ownership and responsibility. When communities are given space to innovate, make local decisions, and see the impact of their actions, hope naturally grows as a result of direct experience and confidence in the future.

Furthermore, a vision of the future that is communicated positively and grounded is also necessary to sustain hope in the long term. This vision should

be designed not as an abstract utopia, but as a reflection of an achievable future that integrates ecological, social, and economic dimensions. In environmental education, the curriculum should include not only scientific understanding and critical awareness of the environmental crisis, but also concrete examples of solutions, inspiring case studies, and the development of ecological imagination. Hope grows when students are able to imagine a better future and see the path to it. This is where the media, opinion leaders, and public figures play a crucial role in disseminating constructive narratives. The media has the power to frame environmental issues constructively, elevate the voices of communities that are successfully making changes, and spread optimism based on facts and concrete actions (Zikargae et al., 2022). Opinion leaders, both in local communities and at national and global levels, can be catalysts for change by leading by example and voicing both the urgency and the possibility of improvement.

A strategic approach to fostering hope also requires a balance between knowledge and emotion. Too much emphasis on the emotional side without a solid foundation of information can create a fleeting, fragile euphoria. Conversely, overly technical and dry information lacking an emotional dimension can dampen enthusiasm (Schneider-Mayerson et al., 2023). Therefore, environmental communication that inspires hope must be designed holistically, combining data with stories, analysis with experience, and knowledge with empathy. In education, teachers and facilitators need to play the role of change agents, not only transmitting information but also guiding students to construct meaning, reflection, and value orientations. Education that integrates affective, cognitive, and social aspects will be more effective in shaping positive attitudes toward the environment and nurturing hope as a source of motivation.

More broadly, strategies to foster hope need to be part of sustainable public policy. Governments and educational institutions must create a supportive learning ecosystem, including providing access to relevant environmental education resources, supporting research and social innovation, and opening up space for citizen participation in environmental decision-making. Hope does not grow in a vacuum; It requires structural and cultural support that encourages engagement, values local contributions, and affirms that every individual and community has the potential to be part of the solution. When environmental communication and education are designed to reinforce hope, not as an illusion, but as a realistic, transformative force, collective change toward a sustainable future becomes more likely.

### **Challenges and Limitations of the Role of Hope in Environmental Action**

In the context of increasingly complex and pressing environmental struggles, hope is often positioned as a psychological force capable of motivating individuals and communities toward meaningful action. However, like any other emotion or motivation, hope is not without risks and limitations. A number of fundamental challenges need to be recognized so that the role of hope in encouraging pro-environmental action can be interpreted and utilized more wisely and strategically. One of the most striking challenges is the emergence of false hope, a form of hope that is not supported by reality, capacity, or the possibility of adequate achievement (Vandaele & Stålhammar, 2022). False hope can arise from populist narratives or instant solutions that are rhetorically pleasing but substantively misleading. For example, the belief that a particular technological innovation will automatically save the earth without requiring changes in human behavior can breed complacency, which in turn weakens the drive to take active action. Such false hope has the potential to prolong the status quo and delay truly urgent systemic transformation.

In addition to false hope, there is also a passive form of hope, namely hope that is not accompanied by commitment, plans, or concrete efforts to realize it. Passive hope often manifests itself in expressions such as "I hope things get better" or "I hope the government acts," without direct individual involvement in the desired change. In the context of the global environmental crisis, this kind of hope can be a hidden barrier to mass mobilization and collective action. Passive hope tends to be consumptive of optimism and can turn into deep disappointment when reality fails to improve. This situation risks reinforcing the feelings of helplessness and apathy that have long been key obstacles to building a resilient and sustainable environmental movement (Bender & Rawluk, 2023).

Another equally important challenge is the tension between realistic expectations and the growing urgency of the environmental crisis. On the one hand, realistic expectations, based on a rational analysis of opportunities and obstacles, are necessary to ensure that actions remain focused and avoid falling into unproductive utopias (Dean & Wilson, 2023). However, on the other hand, global environmental crises such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and systemic pollution demand swift, radical, and transformative responses. In such circumstances, realistic expectations are sometimes perceived as too slow or too cautious to keep pace with the rapidity of the deterioration (Chawla, 2020). This raises a dilemma: should we cling to realistic expectations despite the slow

pace, or should we boldly embrace a transformative vision despite the high risks and uncertain path?

This tension also poses challenges in public communication about the environment. Narratives that overemphasize urgency can trigger fear, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion, leading to withdrawal, while overly optimistic narratives that ignore real challenges can create the illusion of success. Educators, activists, and policymakers need to find a delicate balance in framing hope: hope that can generate collective energy and strengthen psychological resilience, without falling into false euphoria or emotional stagnation. Hope must be formulated honestly, based on data, but also open to moral and ethical imaginations for a more just and sustainable future (Baker et al., 2021).

In building a healthy ecology of hope, it is crucial to develop emotional literacy and critical reflection within society. Hope must be linked to responsibility, not simply to the desire or expectation of external solutions. Sustainable environmental action requires an active form of hope, one that encourages individuals and groups to continue learning, adapting, and innovating despite the long and uncertain road ahead. Hope must not remain merely psychological or symbolic; It must be translated into social strategies, concrete policies, and tangible behavioral changes (Calculli et al., 2021). Thus, hope can be a liberating, transformative force, not simply an escape from reality or a denial of crisis.

The challenges and limitations of managing hope should not be viewed as absolute obstacles, but rather as a call to a deeper understanding of the psychological and social dynamics of environmental change. In a world marked by ecological uncertainty and complex systemic challenges, hope remains a valuable asset (Schwartz et al., 2023). However, like all assets, hope needs to be nurtured, critiqued, and directed wisely to prevent it from backfiring. By recognizing the risks of false hope, the dangers of passive hope, and the tension between realistic expectations and the urgency of crisis, societies can develop a more resilient, collaborative, and action-oriented form of hope. This kind of hope is what is needed to address the environmental challenges of the 21st century.

## **CONCLUSION**

The conclusions of this study confirm that hope plays a crucial role in encouraging pro-environmental behavior amidst complex and often anxiety-inducing ecological challenges. Hope is not merely a passive emotional response, but rather a psychological force that can shape individuals'

perceptions of the future, mediate negative emotions such as eco-anxiety, and strengthen motivation to act constructively. In the context of climate change and worsening environmental degradation, hope serves as an emotional resource that strengthens the belief that individual and collective action can bring about real change.

Findings from various studies indicate that individuals with high levels of hope tend to demonstrate greater engagement in environmentally friendly practices, both at the personal and social levels. Hope interacts with other factors such as self-efficacy, environmental values, and social support, and plays a role in shaping long-term intentions and commitment to environmental action. Thus, fostering realistic and informed hope is an important strategy for increasing public participation in the sustainability agenda.

Overall, integrating emotional dimensions, particularly hope, into approaches to pro-environmental behavior opens up new opportunities for the design of policy interventions and environmental education. This approach focuses not only on cognitive and behavioral aspects but also on strengthening individuals' emotional capacities to face the climate crisis with resilience and a collaborative spirit. Therefore, creating positive narratives, highlighting environmental success stories, and building a sense of collective ownership of the planet's future are crucial steps in nurturing hope and fostering sustainable environmental action.

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