Adolescents’ associations between travel behaviour and environmental impact: A qualitative study based on the Norm-Activation Model

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The negative environmental impact of car-dependent daily transport is well known. Young people of today are the potential drivers of the future and their mode choice will influence the environment for many years. This study explores the associations drawn between daily transport and environmental impact among 15-year-old Danish adolescents. We conducted 50 in-depth interviews and analysed them using a data-driven inductive thematic approach. We interpret differences in pro-environmental awareness and engagement on the background of the Norm-Activation Model (Schwartz, 1977). Based on their personal norm and the denial of consequences and responsibility of own behaviour, we identified five sub-groups of adolescents called Environmentalists, Pragmatics, Indifferent, De-emphasisers, and Deniers. Results indicate a need for measures to increase adolescents’ awareness and acceptance of daily transport as a relevant issue in relation to sustainability. Such measures should include tangible feedback in a daily context while taking different coping strategies with regard to climate change into account.