The role of emotional intelligence as an underlying factor towards social acceptance of green investments

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Abstract. This study focuses on the relationship between public acceptance of renewable energy investments and emotional intelligence. For the purpose of this study, a questionnaire survey was conducted at the regional unit of Evia - Greece, by selecting a sample of 366 residents. Statistical analysis revealed the existence of a positive correlation between trait emotional intelligence and willingness to invest in renewable energy sources. Furthermore, statistically significant correlation was also found between emotional intelligence and citizens views about the contribution of renewable energy sources to life quality and environmental improvement.

Keywords: Renewable energy sources, public acceptance, emotional intelligence, green investments, TEIQue

1 Introduction

The impacts of climate change are noticeable, and the need for the promotion of green investments and a shift to renewable energy sources (RES) are considered to be imperative (Kyriakopoulos et al., 2015; Papageorgiou et al., 2015). Social acceptance of renewable energy systems is measured both at a national and local level, since citizens' attitude towards RES can vary not only between countries but also between regions in the same country (Bertsch et al, 2016; Tabi and Wüstenhagen, 2017; Enevoldsen and Sovacool, 2016). The term social acceptance is used in many studies, incorporating various concepts. In several studies, the term "social acceptance" is used to assess the degree of people's readiness to accept a particular form of renewable energy investment in their region (Liu et al; 2014; Caporale and De Lucia, 2015; Hall et al., 2013; D'Souza and Yiridoe; 2014). In other studies the term "social acceptance" is used as an assessment measure of active or passive citizens' attitude towards various technologies / RES products (Rosso-Cerón

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and Kafarov, 2015). Several studies concerning Greece reflect positive citizens' attitudes towards various forms of green investments and social responsibility actions (Zografakis et al, 2010; Arabatzis and Myronidis, 2011; Chalikias, 2013; Chalikias & Kolovos 2013; Kaldellis et al, 2012; Skordoulis et al, 2013; Ntanos et al, 2016). A common finding in most studies measuring social acceptance is the need for providing additional information to stakeholders. Most environmental campaigns run on the principle that people need more information to behave pro-environmentally. However, the approach of increasing social acceptance only in terms of "information" has been criticized as insufficient to promote behavioural change, as personality characteristics are not taken into account (Schultz, 2002; Schultz et al, 2004; Chalikias et. al, 2011; Kellstedt, Zahran, & Vedlitz, 2008; Ockwell et al, 2009). By using tools of social psychology, numerous studies examine environmental attitudes and behaviours of individuals, under the prism of personality traits (Parant et al, 2017; Stigka et al, 2014; Yazdanpanah et al, 2015; Aaen et al, 2016). Dunlap and Van Lier have created an instrument known as the NEP scale, for measuring environmental attitudes and ecological intention (Dunlap and Van Lier, 1978). An interesting approach to the characteristics of the human personality, which also includes individuals' sensitivity towards the social environment, is the concept of emotional intelligence. There is considerable debate about the feasibility of measuring emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1996, Steiner, 1997). Emotional intelligence is defined as the ability to perceive, assess and generate emotions as well as understanding emotions and their regulation, so as to better promote both feelings and thinking (Salovey and Mayer, 1989). People with high emotional intelligence tend to have the ability to persist and to motivate themselves and others in difficult situations. They can also control their emotions and develop high levels of empathy (Goleman, 1996). Furthermore, people with increased emotional intelligence display more willingness to cooperate and adopt a moral attitude towards their work (Tsaousis et al., 2005).

There are many different tools that can be used to measure emotional intelligence, including the Trait Meta-Mood Scale (TMMS, Salovey, 1995), the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory EQ-I (Bar-On, 2002), the Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale SEIS (Schutte et al, 1998), the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire TEIQUe Short Form (Petrides and Furnham, 2001,2003, Petrides et al., 2010).

In the light of approaching social acceptance on the basis of personality, the interest of this research focuses on the investigation of the relation between emotional intelligence and social acceptance of RES. Data collection is performed through by using a two dimensional questionnaire, in order to estimate: a) the degree of emotional intelligence and b) the level of social acceptance of RES investments. Hypothesis tests were performed in order to examine the relation between those two variables and investigate the possible existence of a statistically significant relation.

2 Methodology

Due to its high wind potential, southern Evia has already attracted investment interest in the wind energy sector. Most wind parks in or country are located in central Greece and Evia. According to Baltas & Dervos (2012), three wind priority areas (WPA) are distinguished in Greece. WPA's are continental areas with comparative advantages for wind farms. The total usable capacity in the Greek wind priority areas is estimated at 2537 typical wind turbines, or 5074 MWe. Evia has been classified in the 2nd wind priority area, according to the previous distinction. Southern Evia presents the highest wind power density per km^2 compared to the national average. There are running applications for 1578 MW wind power projects that have been submitted to the Regulatory Authority for Energy (Kontogianni et al, 2014). The recent completion of a new 150kV submarine interconnection between south Evia island and Attica region will enable the development of 380MW of new wind power capacity in south Evia and the nearby Cycladic Islands of Andros and Tinos. The development has an estimated investment value of €700 million which will be sponsored by some of the prominent market players. Moreover, the scheduled upgrade of existing grid infrastructure in the area to 400kV will enable the development of additional 450MW– 550MW of wind power capacity in south Evia in the future (Norton, 2017). Because of the renewable potential of the area, the region of Evia was selected in the context of this study.

A questionnaire survey was conducted during the period of March 2016 to September 2016 by using random stratified sampling. According to 2001 census, conducted by the Hellenic Statistical Authority, the population of Evia regional unit is 207,305 inhabitants (National Statistics, 2009). The stratification research was done at a municipal level, using the electoral register per municipality, for all 27 constituencies of the county regions. With this method we achieve a sample unit consisting of adults over 18 years old. The regional unit of Evia has 432 polling stations with 204,938 registered at the parliamentary elections of September 2015. The electoral lists of January 2015, broken down by polling station, were retrieved from the Ministry of Interior (Ministry of Interior, 2016). For the calculation of the sample size, given that the dispersion of the population for the variables of our investigation was unknown, a pre-study was conducted in the area with a sample of size n = 50 respondents. By using this pilot sample, the variance (s^2) and standard deviation (s) were calculated for each quantitative variable, and the ratio (p) for each qualitative variable research. The appropriate sample size was estimated at 366 persons, by using the proportions equation, with an error e = 0.05. The questionnaire is divided into two sections. The first section contains 30 questions that are used to calculate the level of an individuals' emotional intelligence. These questions are known as the TEIQue-SF scale (Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire - short form) which is an internationally recognized emotional intelligence measurement tool (Psychometric Lab, 2016a; Zampetakis, 2011). Answers to each item on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree), are summed to calculate the total score; half the questions are reverse-scored. The higher the score, the more

emotionally intelligent the respondent perceives himself to be. The second section of the questionnaire contains various questions on RES, concerning degree of knowledge and acceptance of consumers for investments in the photovoltaic sector, small hydro parks, wind energy and biomass. The questions were drawn from similar surveys on social acceptance of RES (Arabatzis and Myronidis, 2011; Kyriakopoulos et. al., 2010; Chalikias et. al., 2010; Kolovos et. al., 2011; Kyriakopoulos and Chalikias, 2013; Arabatzis and Malesios, 2013; Kaldellis, 2005; Zografakis et al. 2010).

The main research aim is to examine if there is a correlation between willingness to invest and emotional intelligence. Statistical analysis includes independent samples t-test and the Spearman correlation coefficient.

3 Analysis

The sample consists of 366 respondents from the regional unit of Evia. Regarding their gender, 53.3% are men and 46.7% women. The average age of the sample is 38.6 years and the predominant age group category 41-44 years, including 30.0% of the respondents. The predominant level of education is high school (39.7%) with second the TEI / University category (27.2%). A percentage of 47.4% of the sample declared an individual annual income up to € 10.000, while it should be noted that about 1/4 of the sample declares income up to € 5000. Only 15% of the sample reported annual income above 20,000 euros. Concerning occupational status, the employees in public and private sectors account for 51.4% of the sample, while a percentage of 22.5% of the sample are students, unemployed and housekeepers. With regard to the area of residence, the majority of the sample (38.6%) resides in suburban areas, a 33,3% in urban areas and the remaining 28.1% in rural areas.

The average emotional intelligence according to TEIQue-SF scale, is estimated at 4.66 units to a maximum of 7. On a dichotomous question (yes / no) regarding the RES investment desire, 72.8% of the sample said they would like to invest in renewable energy technologies. On several questions about the degree of knowledge on various forms of renewable energy, a percentage of 38.2% of respondents reported a good or very good knowledge of solar energy, followed by wind energy with 34.5%. Less known forms of renewable energy are small hydroelectric and biomass by gathering a percentage of about 19%. Concerning the contribution of renewables, about 51% responded that renewable energy sources contribute to the improvement of living standards while 65.5% answered that they contribute to environmental improvement. More than half of the respondents agreed or fully agreed on the statement that renewable energy is an economically efficient and socially acceptable investment area. When asked about factors contributing the most towards the spread of renewables, a percentage of 71% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed on the increasing need for environmental protection. The second factor is updated information while the third factor is economic reasons, with rates of 57.4% and 57.3% respectively.

For the purpose of the analysis, we tested the variable named “emotional intelligence” for normality by using the “One sample K-S” command in SPSS. By

observing the statistical significance of the test (.sig>0.05) we accepted that sample distribution comes from a normal distribution. A hypothesis test followed, between the variables "willingness to invest" and "emotional intelligence". The test hypotheses are:

H0: There is no correlation between investment desire and emotional intelligence
H1: There is a correlation between investment desire and emotional intelligence

Table 1. Mean score on emotional intelligence for respondents who would invest in renewable sources and respondents who would not invest in renewable sources

Group Statistics					
Would you invest in RES?		N	Mean EQ score	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Emotional Intelligence (EQ)	YES	238	4.73	0.66	0.04
	NO	80	4.45	0.61	0.07

Table 2. Independent samples t-test depicting the statistical significance of the mean score difference on emotional intelligence between potential investors and non-investors in RES

Levene test		t-test for Equality of Means						
F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
.694	.405	3.344	316	**.001**	**.28**	.083	.115	.443
		3.471	145.3	.001	.28	.080	.120	.437

We observe that participants who express desire for investment in RES (category "YES") have an average emotional intelligence score of 4.73 out of 7, while those who do not want investment in RES have an average emotional intelligence of 4.45. We also observe/notice from the independent samples t-test that the difference between the two groups is considered statistically significant at the 99.9% level. Therefore, it is obvious that respondents who gave a positive answer on RES investment have a higher emotional intelligence quotient. This connection between EQ and investment desire is of particular interest and is subject to further investigation.

Continuing the analysis, we associated emotional intelligence score with respondents' views on various statements concerning RES issues, through Spearman correlation coefficient.

Table 3. Spearman correlation coefficient between emotional intelligence and respondents' opinion on issues concerning renewable energy systems

		Emotional Intelligence (mean score)	1. RES contribute to improved living condition	2. RES contribute to environment improve	3. Renewable energy is cost-effective invest	4. RES invest socially acceptble
Emotional Intelligence (mean score)	Spearman Correlation	1	.155**	.121*	.077	.190**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.006	.031	.172	.001
1. RES contribute to improved living conditions	Spearman Correlation	.155**	1	.567**	.305**	.216**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006		.000	.000	.000
2. RES contribute to environment improvement	Spearman Correlation	.121*	.567**	1	.239**	.312**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.031	.000		.000	.000
3. Renewable energy is cost-effective investment	Spearman Correlation	.077	.305**	.239**	1	.362**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.172	.000	.000		.000
4. RES invest socially acceptable	Spearman Correlation	.190**	.216**	.312**	.362**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000	.000	.000	

Results confirm a relationship between emotional intelligence quotient and the view that a) RES is a socially acceptable investment area; Spearman correlation coefficient =0.190 and sig = 0,001, b) RES contribute to improved living conditions; Spearman correlation coefficient =0.155 and sig = 0.006 and c) RES contribute to environmental improvement; Spearman correlation coefficient =0.121 and sig = 0.031. Furthermore, no statistically significant correlation was detected between emotional intelligence and the belief that renewable energy is an economically efficient investment. As it can be seen from the means plot below (fig.1) and as shown by the previous analysis, there is a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and the view of respondents on the environmental and social contribution of green investment.

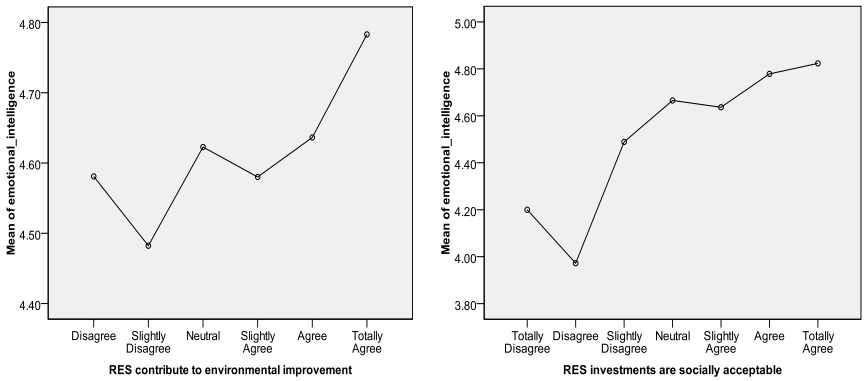

Fig. 1. Mean plots between emotional intelligence mean score and public acceptance of renewable energy systems, depicting a positive relation

4 Conclusions

This study focuses on the relation between emotional intelligence and citizens attitudes towards renewable energy sources. Data collection was performed through a questionnaire survey at Evia regional unit, Greece. The sample majority (72%), exhibited willingness to invest in renewable energy sources (RES). Out of the respondents who wish to invest in RES, the majority prefers solar photovoltaics (62%), with wind energy (23%) as the second most desirable investment, whereas biomass and small hydropower parks gather low rates of investment desire. Investment preference is consistent with the degree of acquaintance with the various forms of renewable energy, since a percentage of 38.2% of respondents declared to be familiar or very familiar with solar energy, followed by wind energy with a percentage of 34.5%. The least recognizable forms of renewable energy systems are the small hydroelectric parks and the biomass energy systems, which gather a percentage of good or very good knowledge at about 19%. Concerning emotional intelligence of the respondents, the mean sample score is 4.66 / 7, which is consistent with similar studies. In statistical tests examining the relation of emotional intelligence with public acceptance of renewable energy systems, a weak positive correlation was found between emotional intelligence and a) the desire to invest in renewable energy, b) social acceptance c) public opinion concerning the contribution of these investments to increased living standards. The results revealed that respondents who are willing to invest in RES scored higher on the emotional intelligence section of the questionnaire. To have a clearer view of the income status of those who are willing to invest in RES, we performed a chi square test between "income" variable and the binary variable "would you invest in RES". We noticed that out of those who were willing to invest in RES, which have exhibited a higher EQ score as previously mentioned, the categories of annual income between 10,000 –

25,000 euros include more respondents that expected. It therefore appears that the attitude of respondents' towards green investments is more positive amongst those who exhibit a higher emotional level and becomes even stronger at medium to high income levels, although further research with different samples is required in order for this finding to be validated. The increase of emotional intelligence amongst individuals through intervention programs even from the primary and secondary education level is a concept with prominent results in the context of environmental awareness (Nelis et al, 2009; Viguer et al., 2017).

This study belongs to the area of similar studies reported in the literature review and dealing with how personality characteristics can incite social acceptance of RES investments.

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