

# SOCIETY BRIEF #3

## How do urban citizens perceive the envisioned forest-based bioeconomy in Europe?

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*Grand societal changes require engaging with the values and rights of ordinary citizens not only as a matter of justice, but as their roles in influencing the pace and direction of change. However, the envisioned forest-based (FB) bioeconomy remains an ambiguous idea to most citizens. We wanted to know if and how urban Europeans align their perceptions of FB bioeconomy along the different dimensions of their cultural worldview.*

### Highlights

- A survey was carried out in eight countries to elicit urban Europeans' perceptions about forest-based bioeconomy.
- Results show a three-dimensional worldview in the context of FB bioeconomy.
- Citizens exhibiting **bio-consent** believe in the society-wide benefits of forest-based bioeconomy. Those aligning along **bio-prudence** are precautionous about the environmental effects of a forest-based bioeconomy. Those emphasising **laissez-faire** express belief in techno-optimism and economic liberalism.
- Understanding how citizens interpret forest-based bioeconomy helps decision-makers and fellow citizens to understand and unwind the ambiguity that may cause social tensions.

### Citizen survey

We designed a survey with a set of statements to query about four different aspects of worldviews: role of humans in nature, what is of value, how can one know, and how to best organise society. We collected responses from public spaces in cities in eight European countries. The sample included 1418 valid observations. Average age of participants was 39 years. Most participants perceive low levels of familiarity with FB bioeconomy (Fig. 1).

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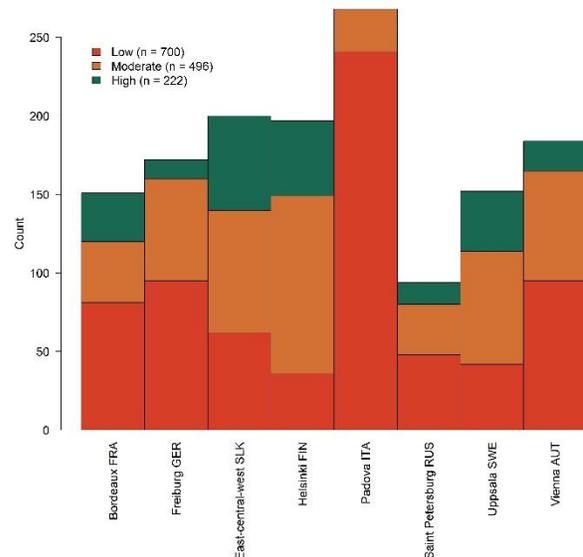


Fig. 1. Perceived familiarity with forest-based bioeconomy in eight parts of Europe.

## Different dimensions of a worldview in the context of forest-based bioeconomy

Urban citizens included in our eight-country sample are best characterised by a three-dimensional worldview.

The first dimension, *bio-consent*, conflues with statements that measure the economic aspects of FB bioeconomy. There is more belief in associated benefits than risks or uncertainties often linked to the bioeconomy development, mainly deriving from the economic prosperity that those emphasising this dimension perceive rather inclusive.

The second dimension, *bio-prudence*, associates with social and ecological considerations of using forests to fuel the transition. This dimension captures the multiple risks and uncertainties related to intensified use of forests. It also connects sustainability concerns regarding local value chains, and positions humans as dependent on a delicate balance of nature.

The third dimension, *laissez-faire*, reflects an instrumental relationship between human and nature, where nature serves to satisfy human needs. There are also some tendencies to rely on technology in guaranteeing the future of the humanity and acknowledge the risks of changing the existing social order.

This model fits particularly well to data from four of the eight countries (Bordeaux, France; East-central-west, Slovakia; Helsinki, Finland; and Vienna, Austria), to younger generations, and to those who declare to be more familiar with FB bioeconomy. Based on the model, we plotted differences within and between citizens from four different parts of Europe (Fig. 2).

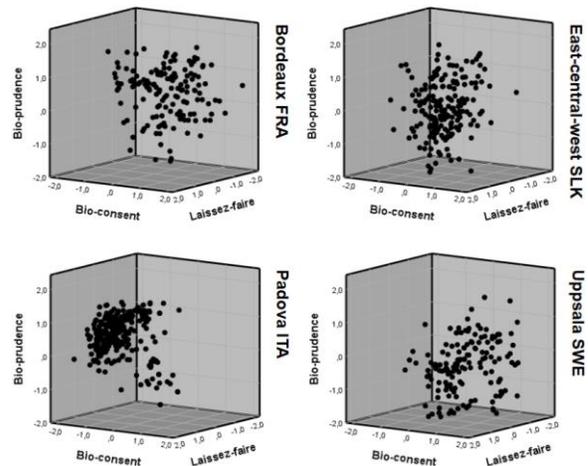


Fig. 2. The emphasis that citizens from four different parts of Europe place on the identified worldview dimensions.

## Conclusion

For decision-makers and fellow citizens, understanding the extent to which urban citizens differ in their ways of interpreting reality is crucial for unwinding the ambiguity around the prospect of increasing the use of forests to fuel the transition to bioeconomy. Such understanding can counter social polarisation with potentially pernicious consequences for societies' problem-solving capacities.

## Recommendations

- Urban Europeans perceive themselves to have rather low levels of familiarity with forest-based bioeconomy – need for basic communication.
- When communicating about forest-based bioeconomy (and governing it), it is useful to acknowledge that different audiences align their perceptions about it along their cultural worldview.
- Proponents of FB bioeconomy should focus on recognising, admitting, and addressing risks and uncertainties.