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Mindchanger identification, analysis and recognition: youth perceptions

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ABSTRACT

Youth participation and activism are considered key factors in making the world a fairer, more inclusive, and sustainable place. In line with this idea, in this work, we aim to understand how young people who actively participate in social organizations perceive the characteristics that define young ‘mindchangers.’ By this concept, we refer to a young citizen who is committed to social justice and willing to change society’s mindsets and catalyse active participation among their peers. In our research design, we adopted a quantitative methodological approach using a survey procedure. The results reveal a high level of agreement on the traits that define a Mindchanger. We conclude by emphasizing that the characteristics to which young respondents attribute the highest importance, such as ‘promoter of change’, ‘open-minded’, ‘interest in global issues’, ‘open to international solidarity’ and ‘empathy’, appear to have the greatest influence on the likelihood of becoming a Mindchanger.

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Sustainability; youth participation; engagement; global awareness; active citizenship

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda are now a core priority of the agendas and policies of virtually every country to protect the planet and improve the lives and prospects of citizens (United Nations, 2015). Although it is possible to see global progress in this direction (United Nations, 2019), actions to achieve these SDGs appear to be advancing at a much slower pace than expected. Governance has become more difficult because of a greater sense of injustice and a rise in populism that advocates simplistic remedies. We are also witnessing a growing disconnect between the people and the institutions that serve them, driven in part by a crisis of that is trust fuelled by the loss of both truth and shared understandings. This admittedly bleak picture calls for a renewed global social contract that is based on human rights and enables many more actors to address increasingly complex and interconnected problems. Such a contract, according to the UN Secretary-General, must have three pillars: ‘(a) trust; (b) inclusion, protection and participation; and (c) measuring and valuing what matters to people and the planet’ (United Nations, 2021a, p. 22). At the same time, we need to significantly increase intergenerational solidarity. ‘Young people need to believe that they have a stake in society and a viable future. They also need to see society believe and invest in them’ (United Nations, 2021a, p. 38).

The big challenge is how to engage young citizens to make the world a fairer, more inclusive and sustainable place (Lüküslü & Walther, 2021). In short, it is how to inspire and motivate them to participate in this new social contract. Young people from around the world have stood out for their

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youth activism in various fields of action. Some well-known examples include Greta Thunberg, a prominent leader against climate change; Malala Yousafzai, advocating for girls' right to education; Emma González and her fight to promote gun control (Amnistía Internacional, 2020; Day, 2019). While the list is much more extensive, not all activists are publicly known and recognized (Betancor & Prieto, 2018; Tejerina, 2010). What characteristics are relevant in socially and environmentally committed young people? What characteristics do active young people consider as distinctive traits of mindchangers? These are the research questions we formulate as the starting point for this work.

This is a core and cross-cutting issue of the 2030 Agenda and other internationally agreed frameworks, that recognize that young people play a strategic role in achieving sustainable development, and thereby preventing crises and promoting peace. For this reason, the *United Nations Youth Strategy* states that 'young people's empowerment, development and engagement is an end in itself, as well as a means to build a better world' (United Nations, 2021b, p. 5). The prominence given to young people is not limited to asking for their support of global initiatives and processes, but also to leading them. Indeed, the first priority of the Strategy is 'engagement, participation and advocacy: amplifying youth voices for the promotion of a peaceful, just and sustainable world.' It calls for greater meaningful participation of young people in intergovernmental forums at global and regional levels, particularly those that are related to the SDGs. It also encourages governments to support youth civic and political participation, including in political and civic processes, platforms and institutions at all levels (Priority 4) and in all stages of formal peace processes and peacebuilding (Priority 5) (United Nations, 2021b).

For some authors (Davies, 2006, p. 6), the active engagement of citizenship with social justice, rights and sustainable development implies something more (or different) than the mere manifestation of awareness and personal concern for what are presented as the most pressing problems in the 21st century (climate change, migration, peace, health, well-being and others). From this perspective, a global citizen is not only aware of the need to guarantee human rights, but also to manifest his or her capacity and commitment to them by actions.

In line with this same approach, the Council of the European Union (2018) considers it necessary to identify, recognize and value the committed action of those people or social agents who can make our youth aware of their power as global citizens, and the responsibilities that come with that power. We refer in this paper to these people or social agents as mindchangers.

By mindchanger, we mean the ability and willingness to influence other people or groups intentionally so that they become actively engaged in the effort to advance the common welfare and sustainable development. In this sense, it is important to underline the term intentional, because the Mindchanger's actions are justified in a conscious and strategic way by achieving expected objectives. Thus, when these efforts are consciously and intentionally directed towards achieving the SDGs, we speak of active engagement. In a way, active engagement represents the motivation (manifest willingness) of a person or social agent to make an effort to achieve the stated goals (e.g. those that are related to migration and climate change).

This definition leads us to ask about the personal characteristics and skills that define the Mindchanger as a young citizen who is committed to social justice and is willing to act despite the global challenges. Although we do not find many empirical studies that answer this question (Holmén et al., 2021), it is possible to identify personal values, attitudes and skills of persons in validated programmes of education in responsible global citizenship. One of the most cited models is that of Oxfam (1997, 2015). It emphasizes knowledge in subjects related to social justice, globalization and sustainable development, matters related to cooperation, communication and critical thinking, as well as values of, and respect for, diversity, concern for the environment and engagement in sustainable development. Of particular interest to us in this study were the effects on the transition from awareness to engagement and active participation of young people to deal effectively with the challenges that arise in a local context. To that end, it is interesting to understand what aspects or traits characterize young mindchangers in order to support relevant aspects for engagement in favour of social, economic, and environmental sustainability through formal and informal education.

Social participation and youth activism

Youth participation is a complex issue that requires different perspectives of research and action (Lüküslü & Walther, 2021). It is a present and future challenge that requires a culture that can provide the conditions that are necessary to equip people with the competences required to deal with the challenge (Montenegro & Raya, 2020). Since the endorsement in 1965 of the Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples by the United Nations General Assembly, it has been recognized that ‘the imagination, ideals and energy of young people are vital to the continuing development of the societies in which they live’ (United Nations, 2010). This recognition underlies the different actions that this international body sponsors in favour of young people.

However, as established in the United Nations World Plan of Action for Youth, young people are also agents, beneficiaries and victims of major societal change (United Nations, 2010). Hence, it is important to enhance their active role by the use of various participation mechanisms.

United Nations Security Council Resolutions 2250 (2015) and 2419 (2018) urge member states to promote the active participation of young people in a meaningful way. This highlights the need for further study and development of projects that will help us to understand and identify the relevant elements of youth participation.

The scientific literature is neither unanimous nor precise on the meaning of participation (Rowe & Frewer, 2005). Participation can be defined as ‘any action by citizens aimed at influencing the political process and its outcomes’ (Anduiza & Bosch, 2007). However, in addition to the processes of influencing political issues, there are also forms of citizen or civic participation (Kitanova, 2020). Thus, in that sense, participation refers to ‘all political and social practices by which citizens seek to influence some dimension of what is collective’ (Parés, 2014).

Under the same term it is possible to identify different forms of participation that oscillate between two poles: *being part of* or *taking part in* (Raya et al., 2020). The first refers to receiving benefits or having access to services. It would, therefore, be passive participation. The second refers to the collective capacity to promote initiatives to dynamize social life. In specialized literature, there is a consensus on the existence of different levels of participation. Thus, there is frequent reference to the ladder of participation (Arnstein, 1969; Hart, 1993) or the engagement pyramid (Rosenblatt, 2010).

Participation is one of the basic principles of social planning and good governance that is set out in the White Paper on European Governance. It is a key element of integration, cohesion and democratic quality (Pastor, 2015). Participation means greater involvement of people in public affairs. It contributes to the development of dynamic and creative societies (Alberich-Nistal & Espadas-Alcázar, 2014; Brander et al., 2015).

Youth participation has evolved in parallel with the evolution of society. Youth activism has taken on different forms depending on socio-historical and political contexts (Bessant, 2021). From the student movements of the 20th century in various countries (Draper & Savio, 2020; Faber, 2020; Gutiérrez-Slon, 2020; Morente Muñoz, 2023) to activism through social media (Fernández, 2015; Muthukumar, 2020), youth activism brings benefits to young people themselves, strengthens society, and promotes social justice (Conner & Rosen, 2016). Through political activism, ethnically or racially marginalized young people can combat institutional discrimination and seek legislative changes, as seen in the #BlackLivesMatter movement (Hope, 2016). They can address climate change (Neas et al., 2022; Piispa et al., 2023), advance gender equality (Hou, 2020; Jouët, 2018), encourage reporting of gender-based discrimination through #MeToo, and promote political engagement (Bessant, 2022).

Youth activism demonstrates the involvement of young people in activities that go beyond passive leisure and consumption, encompassing political activities. This is what Sarah Pickard has termed ‘politically engaged leisure’ to describe it ‘as a form of post-materialistic leisure within the context of neoliberalism’ (Pickard, 2017, p. 9). Through this type of leisure, individuals meet personal needs and produce a collective good.

Participation and social and political activism are related to the concept of solidarity, not as an obligation but as the force that drives groups to stay united as a community to protect their interests – social solidarity – and through the recognition of injustices and their various forms of domination – political solidarity – (Gaztambide Fernández, 2020). Alongside these concepts and their idealization as an altruistic value, one must not forget the *trap of advocacy* (Romans i Torrent, 2022), which leads to frustration, disappointment, and the abandonment of the cause due to the feeling of inability to convey their demands to policymakers and achieve results. This aspect should be considered particularly in a time like the present characterized by the globalization of social causes, the acceleration of processes, and uncertainty about the ephemeral.

Youth activism for climate justice has gained momentum, opening up new prospects in a context of climate urgency (Svampa, 2020). In these types of movements, the youthful drive is essential. Youth 'are more prone than other age groups to engage in social protest actions or political consumption, such as boycotts or alternative forms of participation' (Betancor & Prieto, 2018, p. 166). There is a consensus on the importance of the engagement and participation of the youth population as agents of development and change (Morgado, 2016; Tilea et al., 2021). This includes their contribution to the 2030 Agenda and also their skills necessary for innovation (European Commission, Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development, 2018). Today's youth will be tomorrow's leaders and, therefore, education is a key driver of change. No person is born with a criminal or intelligent mindset. It is the environment and social conditions that determine one's fate and destiny (Jahan, 2014). The challenge lies in the capacity of societies to promote the traits and values of young people who are committed to the triple perspective of sustainability – economic, social and ecological.

In summary, studies on youth activism highlight the significant role of young people in processes of social change. The Internet and information technologies have given rise to new forms of youth activism and social participation. In any case, from our point of view, involvement in social or environmental causes requires the development of a set of skills and personal traits that characterize these committed young individuals. According to this idea, and based on the described theoretical framework that underlines the need to study and develop projects to help us better identify and understand the relevant elements of youth activism, the following section describes the context, purpose, and objectives of the research.

Context, purpose and objectives of the research

This study is part of the European project entitled 'Mindchangers – Regions and Youth for Planet and People,' whose primary objective is to create opportunities and tools to engage young Europeans in the major challenges of our era, namely climate change, migration and sustainable development.

The Autonomous Community of La Rioja (Spain) participates in its development together with the Piedmont region (Italy), the Rhone-Alpes region (France), the Baden-Württemberg region (Germany), the Wallonie-Bruxelles region (Belgium), the University of Craiova (Romania) and the Coordinator of Non-Governmental Organisations for the Development of La Rioja (Spain). The University of La Rioja is responsible for analysing the elements that can contribute, to a greater extent, to bridging the gap between awareness and concrete action in the case of La Rioja (Spain) in the face of global problems.

In order to address the project's objective, we consider it necessary to first understand what young people are like and how they think as agents of change in their context of action. In this sense, we set out the following research objectives:

- To identify the personal characteristics that differentiate a Mindchanger from the perspective in a local context of the young people who provided input in this research.
- To analyse the characteristics of young people who perceive themselves to be Mindchangers, on the basis of gender and place of residence.

Material and methods

The previous sections have emphasized the significance of youth participation and activism, the evolving role of youth activism, and the importance of understanding the elements of youth participation. In this context, the primary objective of this research, as stated in earlier sections, is to comprehend the personal traits that differentiate young 'Mindchangers'. To achieve this, the research adopted a quantitative methodological approach. It involved a survey as the most appropriate procedure for gathering information relatively quickly and efficiently. The study was conducted in compliance with data protection rules, namely General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679. Also, it obtained the ethical approval from the Bioethical Committee of the University of Torino (Decision no. 0438557/13.07.2021).

Participants

The recommended sample size at regional level was approximately 100 young people aged between 17 and 35 years old. The age range was defined in the research project submitted to the European Commission. When establishing the age limits, the ranges commonly used in different policies and programmes of the consortium countries were considered. The sample size was determined to ensure that there would be a sufficient number of subjects for each region analysed. As the data collection period was limited to two months (July and August 2021), participants were selected by non-probabilistic snowball sampling. This is a recognized and workable method in the social sciences for accessing low-incidence or hard-to-reach populations (Marcus et al., 2017; Naderifar et al., 2017; Parker et al., 2019). In this research, social entities that were working with young people in the Autonomous Community of La Rioja were asked to distribute the questionnaire to persons who are close to, or participating in, these entities.

The survey's sample consisted of 102 respondents of age between 17 and 35 with different demographic profiles, although most respondents (94%) were born in Spain. The average age of was between 25 and 26 years (68% of the participants were between 22 and 28 years of age, 9% were younger than 22 years old, and 33% were older than 28 years old). Further, the majority of respondents were female (73% of the sample). In this respect, it is worth noting that in each of the six participating European countries, the percentage of female respondents who completed the questionnaire exceeded that of the male respondents, ranging from 62% to 77%. This result is consistent with other EU volunteering studies, which report that almost two thirds of volunteers are female (European Commission, 2017). Coinciding with the distribution of the population in the region analysed, two thirds of the respondents live in an urban area that has more than 20,000 inhabitants. In addition, approximately 72% of respondents possess a university degree. In relation to their occupation when they completed the questionnaire, approximately 60% were employed, 23% were studying and 10% were unemployed.

Instrument

To gather information about the subject investigated, an anonymous questionnaire was developed. This included consideration of the recommendations by Lavrakas (2008) in the survey design process.

The Mindchangers project partners suggested 40 traits during the kick-off meeting dedicated to research (prior to the start of the research activity). The engagement pyramid (Rosenblatt, 2010) and previous works, such as Oxfam (1997, 2015) and Tilea et al. (2019), were considered. Subsequently, a team of researchers from the six European countries participating in the project discussed each characteristic, eliminated some, added others, reformulated others, and so on. Finally, 24 personal characteristics were chosen to be included in the questionnaire (Figure 1). They were the most salient personal traits and characteristics from the theoretical framework for the formation of young people with global citizenship awareness and who are able to actively engage in the struggle for greater sustainable development and social justice.

Respondents rated each characteristic on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not very important/not applicable) to 5 (very important/fully applicable). First, the participants were asked to rate the importance of each of these characteristics in a mindchanger, considering that 'young mindchangers have the power to change mentalities in the society they live in and to trigger the active engagement of their peers.' Then, they were asked to rate the extent to which these same characteristics applied to them. Finally, they were asked how likely they would become a Mindchanger. In this case, the answers were given by use of a four-level scale (unlikely, rather likely, likely and very likely).

The reliability of the instrument was tested by Cronbach's alpha. This produced a value of 0.92 for the ideal profile of a Mindchanger, 0.9 for the participant's profile, and 0.93 for the entire questionnaire. All were well above the accepted minimum of 0.70.

Procedure

The questionnaire was administered online, respecting the criteria of anonymity and voluntary participation. The young participants did not receive financial compensation to ensure the impartiality of their responses. We contacted the social organizations that work with young people in La Rioja to present the objective of the research to them. A briefing meeting was held with the individuals responsible for the organizations and/or youth programmes. A total of nine organizations participated in this meeting. They were requested to ensure the participation of young individuals from their organizations. In this way, we sought to ensure the qualification of potential survey respondents to enlist the participation of young people who are socially involved. Thus, this qualified sample made it possible to obtain detailed descriptions and subsequent qualitative conclusions. The information collection process was complemented by dissemination on social networks and the sending of the questionnaire via email to young individuals who met the inclusion criteria.

Data analysis

First, a descriptive analysis of the responses was conducted. Then, to determine whether there were significant differences and because the conditions necessary for the Student's *t*-test could not be ensured, the Mann-Whitney U-test was used to compare the means of two groups (gender). The Kruskal-Wallis test was used for the comparison of two more groups (place of residence and the likelihood of becoming a Mindchanger). In the latter case, the Bonferroni *post-test* was applied to determine between which groups that were compared there were significant differences. To verify the appropriateness of using the Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis U-tests, it was confirmed that there was no evidence against homogeneity of variances using Levene's test. In all tests, the significance level (α) was set at 0.05. The software R, version 4.1.2 (Core Team, 2021) was used for all analyses.

Results

In relation to the first research objective, the respondents' assessment of the characteristics that a mindchanger should possess was analysed. The results are presented as the ideal type identified by the research participants, from a sociological perspective. [Figure 1a](#) shows the mean score, together with the standard deviation, of all the characteristics analysed in order of highest to lowest overall score (represented by the red line). Although all of the analysed characteristics were rated very highly, 10 of them obtained an overall average score above 4.5 points. The 10 were: (1) promoter of change, (2) open-minded, (3) interested in global issues, (4) open to international solidarity, (5) empathetic, (6) open to new challenges, (7) good communicator with young people from my own culture, (8) open to accept multiple perspectives, (9) good communicator with young people from other cultures, (10) and well informed on local and international issues.

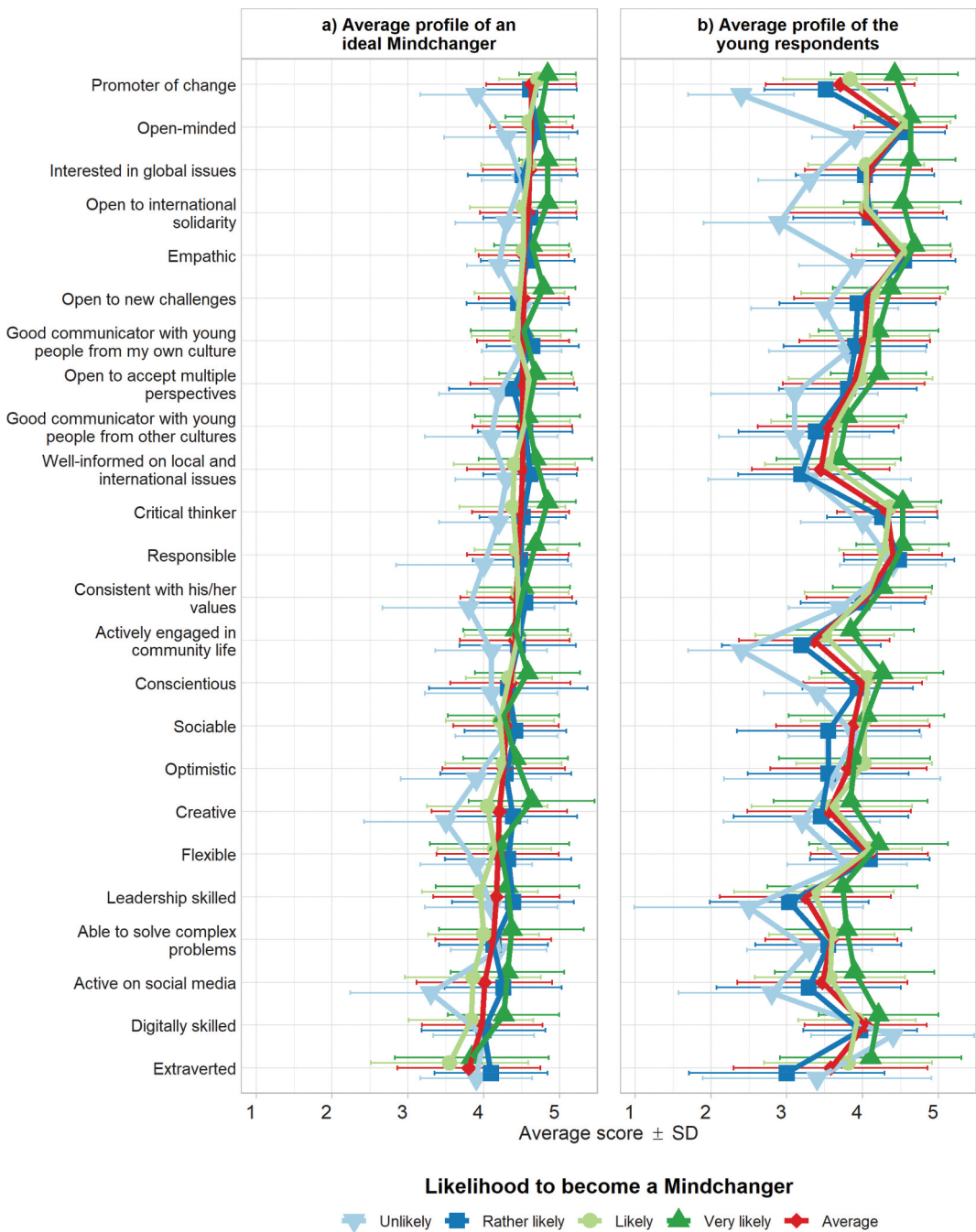


Figure 1. Average profile of an “ideal” mindchanger (a) and young respondents’ self-perceptions (b).

In addition to this overall mean score, mean scores are plotted according to the participants’ stated likelihood of becoming a mindchanger. In general, there is a high degree of consensus in the ratings given by all participants. However, those who considered it unlikely that they would take the step of becoming a mindchanger (‘unlikely’ group) tended to give lower scores (light blue line in Figure 1a). In fact, significant variations were found in only four characteristics (Table 1). This underscores the lower importance given by the ‘unlikely’ group to the promoter of change

Table 1. Characteristics of the 'ideal' mindchanger with statistically significant differences in the likelihood to become a mindchanger (Kruskal-Wallis test results).

Characteristic	χ^2	p	Pairwise comparison
Promoter of change	15.823	.001**	Unlikely \neq Likely, Rather likely, Very likely
Critical thinker	9.123	.028*	Likely \neq Very likely
Creative	15.54	.001**	Unlikely \neq Very likely; Rather likely \neq Very likely
Active on social media	11.156	.011*	Unlikely \neq Rather likely

Degrees of freedom (df) = 3. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

characteristic (*a posteriori* test $p < .05$ between the 'unlikely' group and the 'rather likely' group and $p < .01$ between the 'unlikely' group and the 'likely' and 'very likely' groups) as the most highly rated characteristic overall. Finally, it was found that there were no gender differences in respondents' opinions of the characteristics analysed, as the scores given did not vary significantly.

When participants rated themselves, the scores were lower and more greatly dispersed (Figure 1b) than when they gave to the 'ideal' mindchanger profile (Figure 1a). But the likelihood of becoming mindchangers is higher with the alignment between the young participants' self-perception and the most valued characteristics of the 'ideal' mindchanger profile (Figure 2). Noteworthy in this regard are the statistically significant differences that are identified in the mean values of the participants' profiles for the five characteristics that were rated as most important for an 'ideal' mindchanger: promoter of change, open-minded, interested in global issues, open to international solidarity, and empathetic (Table 2). Overall, the greatest differences were found between those who did not see themselves as future mindchangers ('unlikely' group) and the rest.

Subsequently, and in line with the second research objective, the respondents' profiles were compared in gender and place of residence. In the first case, statistically significant differences were observed in the six characteristics that are shown in Table 3, with women scoring higher than men in all, except for extraversion, as illustrated in Figure 3a. With regard to place of residence, statistically significant differences were observed in three of the six characteristics that also differ by gender (Table 3): open to international solidarity, empathetic and actively engaged in community life. In this case, as Figure 3b shows, participants who live in rural areas rated themselves higher in score than those who live in urban areas and, above all, than those who live in semi-urban areas.

Finally, participants' likelihood to become a mindchanger was compared as a function of gender and place of residence. Tests showed no evidence of statistically significant differences by gender ($W = 1050.5$, $p = 0.679$) or place of residence ($\chi^2 = 3.41$, d.f. = 2, $p = 0.182$).

Discussion and conclusions

The active and responsible participation of young citizens in their immediate social context is the key to successfully addressing the SDGs (Svanström et al., 2008; UNESCO, 2014, 2021). Different studies highlight the lack of political participation of young people, particularly in western democracies (Barrett & Pachi, 2019; Franklin, 2004; Henn & Foard, 2014; Injuve, 2021). In the Spanish context (Injuve, 2021), non-participation has been related to the activity that they are engaged in. Young students have higher rates of political participation than those who are working or are unemployed. This aspect is relevant to the objectives of this research. It allows us to consider the educational space as a key sphere for reinforcing the active participation of the younger generations. Another relevant aspect to consider is the forms of participation. At present, there is more participation in civic matters and less in political matters (Barrett & Pachi, 2019; Fuentes et al., 2020). This is especially relevant in issues that are linked to feminist and environmentalism, as well as to voluntary actions. Currently, it is noted that people in general, and young people in particular, are not so linked as much to organizations as to causes (Roja, 2022). Participation is more flexible and even selective and less committed (Mir, 2013; Parés, 2014). Participation also occurs through social networks (Fernández,

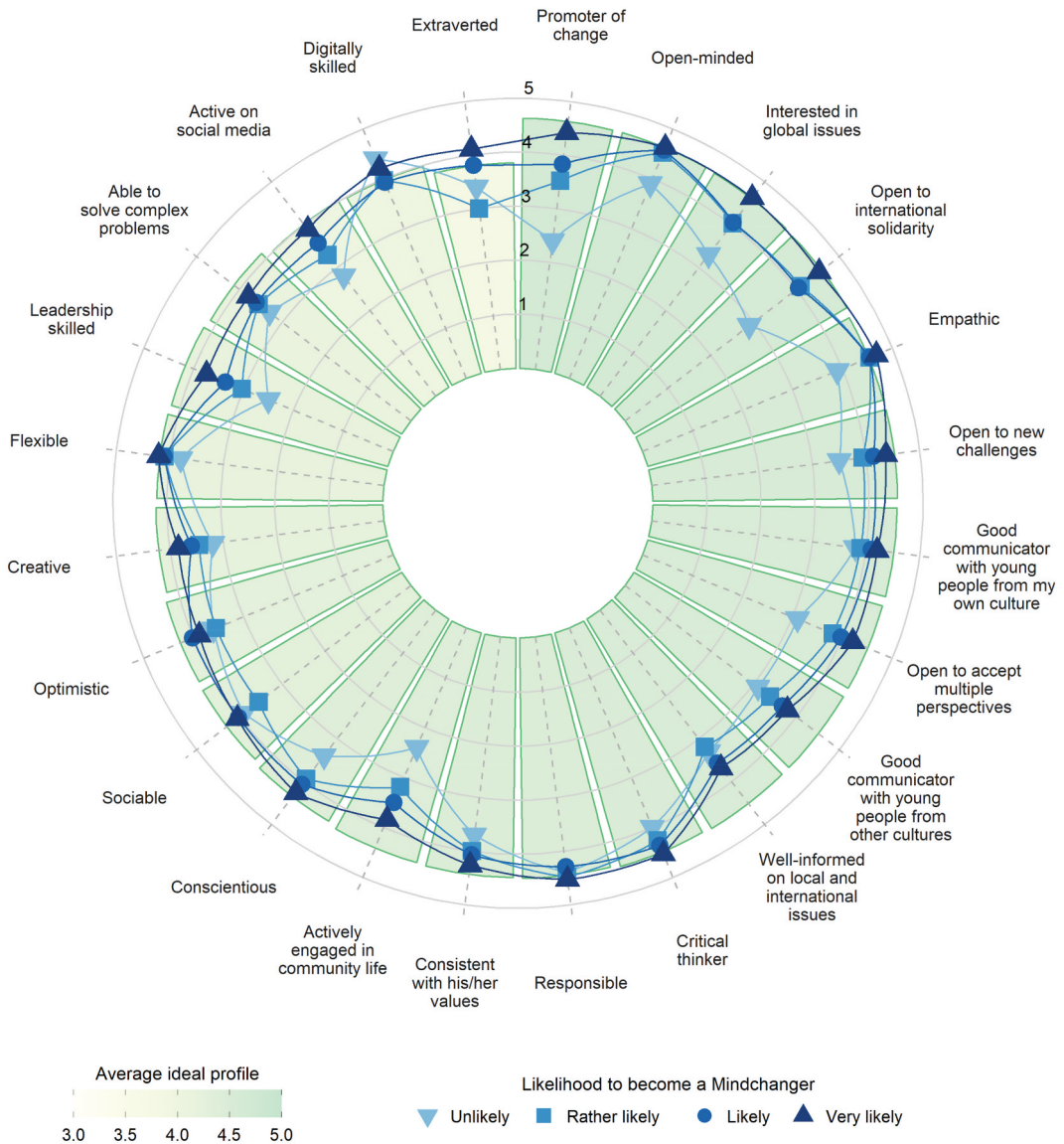


Figure 2. Profile of respondents in their likelihood to become a mindchanger versus the "ideal" profile of a mindchanger.

2012), leading to action by young people who had not been mobilized (García-Galera et al., 2014; Parés, 2014). The forms of youth participation are undergoing changes, with more occasional, non-systematic, flexible, less ideological, and more pragmatic involvement (Betancor & Prieto, 2018; Tejerina, 2010). In many cases, there is also a media influence (Amondarain et al., 2022). Furthermore, research on the motivations of young activists is scarce (Pickard, 2017). Hence, the interest in the results of this study, which allows for the identification of the characteristics of young mindchangers who are engaged in sustainability and social justice. Through their leadership and influence, they can have a multiplier effect on the attitudes, responsible efforts, and actions of young people to make the world more inclusive and sustainable. Thus, this research is novel and may prove useful to local organizations or institutions with the policy-making competence to achieve an increasingly positive and sustainable transformation of society.

Table 2. Characteristics of the young respondents with statistically significant differences in the likelihood to become a mindchanger (Kruskal-Wallis test results).

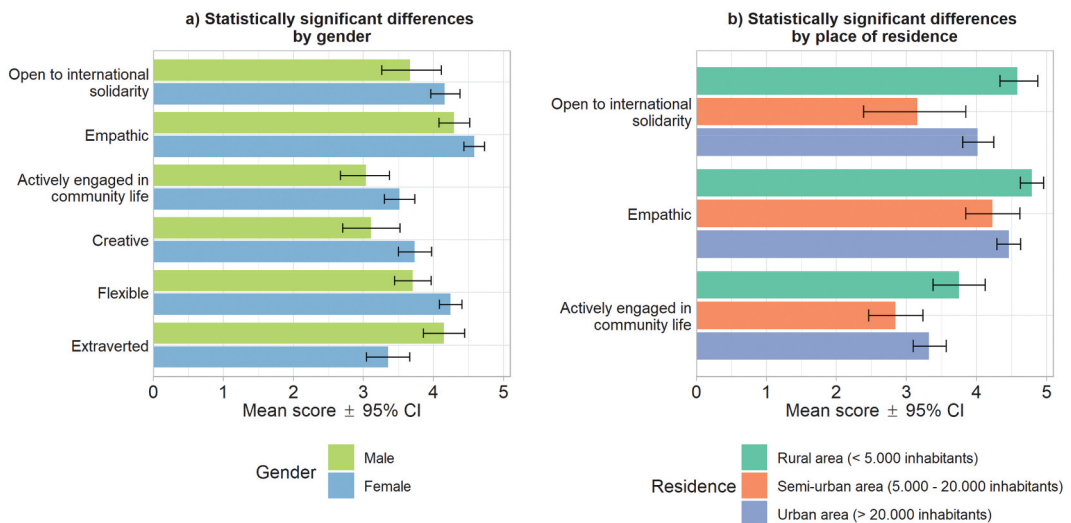
Characteristic	χ^2	<i>p</i>	Pairwise comparison
Promoter of change	27.392	<.001***	Unlikely \neq Likely, Rather likely, Very likely; Rather likely \neq Very likely
Open-minded	11.112	.011*	Unlikely \neq Likely, Rather likely, Very likely
Interested in global issues	17.274	<.001***	Unlikely \neq Very likely; Probable \neq Very likely
Open to international solidarity	16.496	<.001***	Unlikely \neq Likely, Rather likely, Very likely
Empathic	9.177	.027*	Unlikely \neq Very likely
Actively engaged in community life	16.191	.001**	Unlikely \neq Likely; Unlikely \neq Very likely
Extraverted	12.344	.006**	Rather likely \neq Likely; Rather likely \neq Very likely

Degrees of freedom (df) = 3. **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001.

Table 3. Characteristics of the young respondents with statistically significant differences by gender (Mann-whitney U test) and place of residence (Kruskal-Wallis test).

Characteristic	Gender comparison (Mann-Whitney U)		Comparison between place of residence (Kruskal-Wallis)	
	<i>W</i>	<i>p</i>	χ^2	<i>p</i>
Open to international solidarity	1241	.049*	13.468	.001**
Empathic	1268.5	.018*	7.043	.030*
Actively engaged in community life	1289.5	.020*	6.972	.031*
Creative	1311	.013*	2.740	.254
Flexible	1381.5	.002**	4.711	.095
Able to solve complex problems	1263.5	.032*	0.471	.790
Extraverted	664.5	.008**	3.743	.154

p* < .05, *p* < .01.

**Figure 3.** Mean score and 95% confidence interval (CI) for characteristics with statistically significant differences by gender (a) and place of residence (b).

In regard to the first objective, it is possible to describe the general profile of a mindchanger from the perception of the young people themselves as key social agents that are investigated. In this sense, and in line with other studies related to globalization and sustainable development (Oxfam, 1997, 2015; Vega, 2021), there is a high degree of agreement on the personal characteristics that

define a mindchanger. In this case, we mainly discuss young citizens who are: promoters of change, open-minded, interested in global issues, open to international solidarity, empathetic, open to new challenges, possess good communication skills with young people from their own culture and other cultures, open to accept multiple perspectives, and well-informed about local and international issues. It is also noteworthy that the characteristics of the ideal profile of a mindchanger that are perceived to be important are very similar to the values, attitudes, knowledge and skills in the competences necessary for global citizenship in different national and international reports (MECD, 2018; OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2015). The conceptual framework of these competences emphasizes the need to promote in young persons' openness, adaptability and respect for others. It also stresses the importance of knowledge of global issues and intercultural understanding, as well as highlights cognitive and social skills. The latter include critical thinking, communication, empathy and flexibility, all of which are necessary to make a better, more tolerant and sustainable world.

Along the same line, it is interesting to underline the existence among the young participants in the research of a shared imaginary of what it means to be an engaged and responsible young person in his or her environment. Irrespective of the willingness to take an active part or an intention to become engaged, there is a high level of agreement and consensus among the groups of young people who participated in this study of the personal traits of a mindchanger. This confirms, in part, the conclusions drawn by other authors (Davies, 2006; Hong Chui & Leung, 2014) that recognize global citizenship as legitimized only if it involves action and active participation.

With regard to the second objective, significant differences were found in young people's self-perception of their personal profile in respect to the likelihood to become a Mindchanger. The results indicate that young citizens with a higher probability of being a mindchanger recognize that they possess the personal traits that are identified in the ideal profile, among others. These are: promoter of change, open-minded, interested in global issues, open to international solidarity and empathetic. One possible explanation can be found in the expected value theory (Galla et al., 2018; Wang & Eccles, 2013). According to the theory, subjective value beliefs indicate behavioural intention and are an important motivation for action, as they give it meaning. That is, they give a perception of utility value (e.g. the importance of a personal characteristic or skill for future advancement). The intrinsic value attached to the assigned task (e.g. how interesting or enjoyable active participation is for one's own personal and collective well-being) explain to a large extent the participation of the young respondents in active engagement and responsibility for their environment.

There are no significant differences in the likelihood of becoming a Mindchanger that were related to gender or place of residence. However, there are significant differences in self-perception in some of the personal traits that are related to both gender and place of residence. In regard to self-perception, young females have higher mean scores on traits related to empathy, creativity and flexibility, as well as international solidarity and being active in community life. These results are consistent with other research, such as those published by Soutschek et al. (2017), which shows that women tend to behave more prosocially than men. The Injuve youth study (2021) also found that a higher percentage of females engage in volunteering activities (21.2%) than for males (15.9%). For their part, young males score higher on the trait of extroversion. This is consistent with the differences observed in gender studies of the greater use of public space by males and would be associated with more extroverted character traits of this population group that have been identified in other studies (Costa et al., 2001). In particular, when they were associated with traits of domination (Weisberg et al., 2011) and also present in the interaction in social networks (Bunker et al., 2021).

With respect to place of residence, the data show that environments that have less than 5,000 inhabitants have the highest mean scores for the traits of being open to international solidarity, empathetic character and active participation in community life. They are followed by those with more than 20,000 inhabitants. These results would be in line with the influence of the environment on the subjects' lives. Closer environments produce greater trusting and safe interactions, whereas larger environments offer greater opportunities for participation. Intermediate environments would be related to greater social control without the opportunities that larger environments offer. This result may be related to the characteristic of social endogamy that is more typical of intermediate cities (Bellet & Llop, 2004).

In regard to limitations and future research, a reasonable objection to the sampling method that was used is the representativeness of the sample. However, it should be noted that a stratified random probability sampling method would not necessarily achieve representation of young people who recognize themselves as Mindchangers. In any case, the results should be considered to be indicative. Furthermore, this work has focused on the context of La Rioja. From this perspective, it would be interesting to extend the study through a comparative analysis with the results obtained in the remaining participating countries for the same objectives and research methodology of the Project. As Iqbal and Piwowar-Sulej (2022) rightly points out, each country and region have its own culture (beliefs, values, discourses, practices or expressions). This may have influenced the assessments or opinions of the young survey respondents. All in all, this opens new lines of future research. On one hand, it would be of interest to conduct studies focused on environmental activism and the contributions of indigenous knowledge and the relationality of the land. In future research, it would be necessary to consider alternative theoretical approaches that go beyond human-centred perspectives, such as indigenous theories (Cajigas-Rotundo, 2017; Turner, 2006) and posthuman theories (Chavarría Alfaro, 2015). Alongside this, it would be necessary to consider global values and competences to include in a transversal way in the general curriculum of higher education. The main purpose would be to prepare the leaders of the future to respond effectively to the great challenges that arise in an increasingly complex, uncertain and changing society (UNESCO, 2021). Experiences like the one developed by Megan Bang, from 'Learning in Places,'¹ are inspiring for connecting scientific knowledge with learning by involving the local community. In this regard, there seems to be widespread agreement (Caeiro et al., 2020; Findler et al., 2019; Janssens et al., 2022; Poza-Vilches et al., 2022) that universities can play a leading role in achieving the SDGs through integrated educational projects, educational community engagement, research and management. The results of recent studies along these lines (Alm et al., 2022) reinforce the idea that integrated university learning of the identified attitudes and skills on sustainability foster and enhance students' active engagement to this end, and to this end.

Note

1. <http://learninginplaces.org/>. The University of Washington Bothell Goodlad Institute for Educational Renewal, Northwestern University, Tilth Alliance and Seattle Public Schools have partnered for this project. Funded by the National Science Foundation, the project builds outdoor learning spaces and draws upon local communities and green spaces at several Seattle schools while developing a robust model of equitable field-based learning for preK-3 educators to engage students and their families in complex socio-ecological reasoning and decision-making.

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