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The most common environmental concerns and adherence to some eco-friendly practices among Ukrainians¹

It would be no exaggeration to say that all of us would like to live in a healthy natural environment, enjoy lush greenery and beautiful flowers in the summer or white snow in the winter, hear birds chirping in the morning, breathe clean air and drink clear water, as well as have enough opportunities for rest and recuperation. It is therefore not surprising that we feel uncomfortable or stressed and often get sick in an environment which is far from being healthy. It is natural for us to worry about our well-being if the condition of our locality is changing for the worse. We respond to such a change in different ways: by distancing ourselves from some negative effects (e.g. moving to a cleaner or quieter neighbourhood), seeking help from relevant authorities (e.g. when it comes to cutting down trees), taking to the streets to call for a ban on the construction of a skyscraper or to protest against the launch of a nuclear power plant, etc.

Some people think not only of the environmental factors that may affect their health but also about their own impact on the environment. They often break their old habits and espouse new practices for a better life and a healthier planet.

In my presentation I will focus on *how Ukrainians perceive environmental issues and what eco-friendly practices they are willing to take up*. For this purpose, I will first analyse basic findings from several nationwide surveys carried out by different research institutions (or polling companies) from 2015 through 2020 (*N* ranges from

1 This paper is based on the text of the presentation given by the author at the 15th conference of the European Sociological Association «Sociological knowledges for alternative futures» (Barcelona, Spain, 31 August — 3 September 2021). A slightly modified version of this paper is also to be published in the proceedings of an international conference titled «Challenges in developing a sociological theory. Society and state: 30 years of Ukraine's independence» (Kyiv, Ukraine, 24–25 September 2021). The conference was hosted by the Faculty of Sociology, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv.

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1200 to 2100). In these surveys, a respondent was supposed to answer the following questions: a) which environmental problems (given on the list) worry him/her the most; b) who should be held responsible for such a state of affairs (the government, local authorities, politicians, big businesses, ordinary citizens, etc.); c) what the respondent is personally ready to do (or doing at the moment) in order to improve the current situation or tackle the environmental crisis.

The data were gathered from all Ukraine's regions, except for the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and non-government-controlled areas (NGCA) in the East. (The latter are the territories temporarily occupied by pro-Russian separatists.)

Before commenting on the figures, I would like to acquaint the audience with a comprehensive annual survey titled «*Ukrainian society: Monitoring social changes*». The survey was initiated by the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine in 1992, less than a year after this country had gained independence. A questionnaire used in this study consists of 15 sections related to the key spheres of society. Each section («*Economic situation*», «*Political situation*», «*Social well-being and public moods*», «*Local living conditions*», «*Leisure and recreation*», etc.) contains a set of questions that make it possible to record and analyse the changes in the main social indicators.

The latest «Ukrainian society» survey was conducted from 19 September to 9 October 2020. 1,800 people (aged 18 and over) participated, and there was a special section focusing on the current environmental situation. According to the data, 36.6% of respondents felt worried about air pollution due to vehicle emissions, 33.4% were dissatisfied with the sanitary condition of their locality owing to excessive garbage, 26.7% and 20.0% respectively expressed concern over water and soil pollution due to chemicals and industrial waste, 24.3% expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of everyday foods (owing to the high amount of harmful ingredients), and 10.3% mentioned radioactive contamination (because of the 1986 accident at the Chornobyl nuclear power plant) as a factor affecting their health. On the one hand, these figures are not as discouraging as those at the beginning of the 2000s — when nearly half of Ukraine's population showed concern over air and water pollution (47.3% and 46.1% respectively); on the other hand, there has been an increase in the number of people feeling dissatisfied with the quality of the natural environment in many respects (see Table). Besides, over half of those interviewed said that they lacked environmental safety and security.

Well, what do Ukrainians understand by environmental security? As the data of another nationally representative survey show, most of our citizens regard environmental security as a state of the environment which does not affect their lives, health or well-being. (*This survey was undertaken by the Ilko Kucheriv «Democratic Initiatives» Foundation together with the Razumkov Centre Sociological Service in July 2015; 2,100 persons were interviewed.*) Answering the question about basic environmental rights, the majority (71.6%) of respondents mentioned the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment. Still, far fewer (21.4% and 15.5% respectively) knew about the right to start or join an environmental organisation or the right to free access to information related to environmental issues. So, according to these figures, a considerable part of Ukraine's population are not fully conversant with environmental legislation. Another «weakness» of our citizens is low civic engagement: *just a little over one*

per cent of those surveyed were members of an environmental association or movement and 8.3% had taken part (at least once) in an environmental campaign. More than nine tenths (93.1%) had never tried to stand up for their environmental rights even though they had felt that their rights had been violated.

Table

Which environmental pollution factors in your locality worry you the most?
(Mark all applicable answers)

	2002	2004	2005	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018	2020
Air pollution due to chemicals and industrial waste	47.3	34.7	34.3	33.1	32.3	31.4	24.8	23.2	26.2	28.4	31.1
Air pollution due to vehicle emissions	48.0	41.9	39.9	42.5	42.3	43.7	37.9	36.3	32.2	33.3	36.6
Water pollution due to chemicals and industrial waste	46.1	32.6	32.0	29.8	29.3	28.1	22.1	18.8	21.3	23.9	26.7
Soil pollution due to chemicals and industrial waste	32.4	21.6	22.2	17.8	20.2	21.7	14.9	12.3	14.5	15.6	20.0
Environmental pollution of the district where I live due to excessive garbage	54.8	46.7	49.7	51.1	48.5	48.5	35.7	28.1	24.8	26.1	33.4
Radioactive contamination	35.7	28.5	23.7	26.2	22.0	19.9	14.2	13.3	12.0	10.3	10.3
Excessive noise	16.7	13.2	16.2	16.1	17.7	15.8	13.4	15.8	12.9	11.8	12.6
Harmful ingredients in foodstuffs	40.4	28.6	28.9	29.1	36.1	37.9	29.2	21.0	24.5	17.0	24.3
Nothing of the above	9.7	12.4	14.8	13.2	14.2	16.1	25.6	26.9	32.2	32.6	23.5
Other	0.7	1.2	0.4	0.9	1.3	0.4	1.5	1.9	1.4	0.1	0.8
No answer	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.6	0.3	0.1	0.4	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.2

Note: The total percentage exceeds 100 since the respondents could check off several options.

The next survey sheds light on whom ordinary Ukrainians tend to blame for the current environmental problems facing their country. *This study was conducted jointly by «GfK Ukraine» and «Socis», two polling companies, in February–March 2017,* and some of the findings are as follows: about one eighth (11.6%) of respondents thought that industrial corporations should bear responsibility for the damage that their products or activities have done to the natural world. Over half (50.2%) believed that the government was not doing enough to protect the environment, whereas the rest (35.3%) held the view that citizens themselves ought to take care of nature.

As for everyday actions aimed at helping the environment, 62.1% of those surveyed reported cleaning up the area around their house or apartment block, 53.3% and 43.1% were trying to reduce energy and water consumption at home. Yet, it is unclear whether they saved water or energy in order to minimise their impact on the environment or simply to lower their water or electricity bills.

Only a small portion (7.3%) said that they had participated in (or supported) environmental campaigns. Using the mass media (newspapers, magazines, radio, etc.) to

inform the public about environmental pollution in a particular locality or applying to a relevant authority in order to solve that problem turned out to be the least popular activities among our citizens: 6.6% and 7.8% respectively had some experience in handling environmental issues in such a way.

Certainly, we should not forget about environmentally conscious Ukrainians who launch or join important eco-initiatives such as zero waste living or river clean-ups, or those who take part in environmental protests or climate strikes. These people set an inspiring example for others, but they are not in the majority so far.

At this point, we have analysed some survey findings related to the «*environmental profile*» of Ukraine's adult population. However, it would be interesting to know how our young fellow citizens (that is secondary and high school students) feel about the environment — first of all, because they are going to shape the future of that country. To this end, we designed a questionnaire and called it «*How important is nature to you?*» The questionnaire consists of 30 groups of statements, and each group includes three alternatives to choose. Each alternative, in turn, characterises a person's type of world view with regard to the «human-nature» relationship (anthropo-, bio- or ecocentrism).

As you surely know, an *anthropocentric* perspective argues that human beings are the central or most significant entities in the world; thus, the natural world is supposed to serve their needs. A *biocentric* (or nature-centred) approach, in contrast, attaches the greatest value to nature and calls on humans to subordinate themselves to the natural world. *Ecocentrism* lies somewhere between these two extremes; it brings to the fore humans' living and developing in harmony with nature. (There are different descriptions of anthropo-, bio-, and ecocentrism; the above ones belong to Ukrainian and Russian environmental sociologists or psychologists.)¹

The questionnaire is organised in such a manner that its statements cover practically all spheres where humans interact with nature, such as farming, fishing, gardening, crafts, manufacturing, construction, hobbies, outdoor activities, etc. A student's responses are put in a table with three columns, «A», «B» and «E» for statements corresponding to an anthropo-, bio-, or ecocentric type of world view. Each option scores one point regardless of which type of world view it reflects. In each column, the responses are added together, then divided by 30 (the number of statements) and multiplied by 100%. The value obtained is a share of a particular type of world view (anthropo-, bio-, or ecocentric). If we compare these three values, we can see which type of world view (anthropo-, bio-, or ecocentric) prevails in this student. Then we repeat the calculation for other students and eventually see the prevailing type of world view for the whole class.

An example of a statement with three alternatives is given below.

1. We should reduce the consumption of plastic products as far as possible. Not being biodegradable, they are usually collected in landfills or floating in the ocean, thereby inflicting damage on the environment and eventually on us humans. (*This statement represents an ecocentric world view.*)

1 For further details see: Deriabo, S.D., Yasvin, V. A. (1996). *Environmental pedagogy and psychology*. [In Russian]. Rostov-on-Don: Phoenix Press; Liovichkina, A. M. (2004). *The basics of environmental psychology*. [In Ukrainian]. Kyiv, Ukraine: Interregional Academy of Personnel Management Press.

2. We have done nothing but destroy our Mother Nature; so we must stop using everything that is harmful to it, including plastics. (*This statement corresponds to a biocentric world view.*)

3. If you ask me, it doesn't make any sense to give up plastics. First, these products are convenient; second, if we refuse them, a lot of people will lose their jobs. What exactly we should do is to learn how to recycle plastic. (*This statement reflects an anthropocentric type of world view.*)

This spring, the questionnaire was pretested on a sample of 42 high school students (9th, 10th and 11th graders), from the city of Kyiv and Poltava region. The students could complete the questionnaire on paper, and it was also available in electronic form (published on «Vseosvita», a well-known Ukrainian teacher website)¹. The preliminary results indicate a slight prevalence of an ecocentric world view, especially among students from Poltava region. (Poltava is a city in the central part of Ukraine; it has a population of about 250,000.) This is obviously because the school that joined the study is presently being engaged in several environmental projects (such as park and lake clean-ups, developing of open-air educational and recreational areas, building a shelter for stray animals, etc.). So, we can conclude that hands-on experience is conducive to fostering environmental values.

I completely realise that my piece of research is amateurish but it can be part of a larger project. As a Chinese proverb has it: «A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step». And when it comes to the environment, to the interaction between humans and nature, I believe every step matters.

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Стурбованість українців екологічними проблемами та їхня прихильність до екологічно дружніх практик

Матеріал ґрунтований на виступі авторки на XV конференції Європейської соціологічної асоціації «Соціологічні знання для альтернативних майбуттів» (Барселона, 31 серпня — 3 вересня 2021 року), секція дослідницької мережі RN 12 «Довкілля й суспільство». У виступі увага приділялася головно до ставлення різних груп населення України до проблем довкілля, а також готовності українців долучитися до екологічно дружніх практик. Сама презентація складалася з двох частин. Перша містила аналіз даних кількох загальнонаціональних опитувань, здійснених дослідницькими організаціями та опитувальними компаніями з 2015-го до 2020-го (N варіює від 1200 до 2100). Методика дослідження передбачала відповіді на такі запитання: а) які з проблем довкілля (зазначених у списку) турбують респондента/респондентку найбільше; б) хто, на їхню думку, має бути відповідальним за такий стан справ (уряд, місцеві органи влади, політики, представники великого бізнесу, пересічні громадяни тощо); в) що респондент особисто готовий зробити (або вже робить) для того, щоб якось поліпшити стан довкілля чи впоратися з екологічною кризою. У другій частині виступу доповідачка ознайомила аудиторію з результатами анкетування старшокласників (учнів 9-х, 10-х та 11-х класів), яке виконувалося з метою визначення переважного типу світогляду в контексті відношення

1 Maksymenko, O. O. (2020). A questionnaire to determine a person's attitude towards nature. [In Ukrainian]. Vseosvita. Retrieved from: <https://vseosvita.ua/test/vyznachennia-perevazhnoho-typu-stavlennia-osobystosti-do-pryrody-92716.html>

«людина–природа». У дослідженні було використано авторський опитувальник, який складається з 30 блоків суджень (по три в кожному). Кожне судження відповідає антропо-, біо- чи екоцентричному типу екологічного світогляду. У пробному опитуванні, яке здійснювалося навесні 2021 року, взяли участь 42 учні з трьох різних шкіл м. Києва та Полтавської області. Отримані дані показують переважання (хоча й невелике) екоцентричного типу світогляду, особливо серед учнів полтавської школи — ймовірно, завдяки тому, що ця школа є учасницею низки екологічних проєктів, що реалізуються в масштабах громади.

Ключові слова: екологічні проблеми, відношення «людина–природа», антропо-, біо- та екоцентризм, загальнонаціональні опитування, старшокласники

ОЛЬГА МАКСИМЕНКО

Обеспокоенность украинцев экологическими проблемами и их приверженность экологически дружественным практикам

Материал подготовлен на основе выступления автора на XV конференции Европейской социологической ассоциации «Социологические знания для альтернативных будущностей» (Барселона, 31 августа — 3 сентября 2021 года), секция исследовательской сети RN 12 «Окружающая среда и общество». В выступлении основное внимание уделялось отношению разных групп населения Украины к экологическим проблемам, а также готовности украинцев приобщиться к экологически дружественным практикам. Сама презентация состояла из двух частей. В первой содержался анализ данных нескольких общенациональных опросов, осуществленных исследовательскими организациями и опросными компаниями с 2015-го до 2020-го (N варьирует от 1200 до 2100). Методика исследования предусматривала ответы на следующие вопросы: а) какие из проблем окружающей среды (указанных в списке) беспокоят респондента/респондентку больше всего; б) кто, по их мнению, должен нести ответственность за такое положение дел (правительство, местные органы власти, политики, представители крупного бизнеса, рядовые граждане и т. п.); в) что респондент лично готов сделать (или уже делает) для того, чтобы каким-то образом улучшить состояние окружающей среды или справиться с экологическим кризисом. Во второй части выступления докладчица ознакомила аудиторию с результатами анкетирования старшеклассников (учащихся 9-х, 10-х и 11-х классов), которое выполнялось с целью определения преобладающего типа мировоззрения в контексте отношения «человек–природа». В исследовании был использован авторский опросник, состоящий из 30 блоков суждений (по три в каждом). Каждое суждение соответствовало антропо-, био- или экоцентрическому типу экологического мировоззрения. В пробном опросе, который проводился весной 2021 года, приняли участие 42 ученика из трех разных школ г. Киева и Полтавской области. Полученные данные показывают преобладание (хотя и небольшое) экоцентрического типа мировоззрения, особенно среди учащихся полтавской школы — вероятно, благодаря тому, что эта школа в настоящее время является участницей ряда экологических проєктов, реализуемых в масштабах территориальной общины.

Ключевые слова: экологические проблемы, отношение «человек–природа», антропо-, био- и экоцентризм, общенациональные опросы, старшеклассники

ОЛЬГА МАКСИМЕНКО

The most common environmental concerns and adherence to some eco-friendly practices among Ukrainians

The paper acquaints the reader with the presentation given by the author at the 15th ESA (European Sociological Association) conference «Sociological knowledges for alternative futures» (Barcelona, Spain, 31 August — 3 September 2021), research network RN 12 «Environment and society». The attitudes

towards environmental issues shared by different groups of Ukraine's population, along with their willingness to take up some eco-friendly practices, constituted the focus of this presentation. Structurally, it can be divided into two parts. The first one involved the analysis of findings from several nationwide surveys performed by different research institutions and polling companies from 2015 through 2020 (N ranges from 1200 to 2100). In these surveys, a respondent was supposed to answer the following questions: a) which environmental problems (given on the list) worry him/her the most; b) who should be held responsible for such a state of affairs (the government, local authorities, politicians, big businesses, ordinary citizens, etc.); c) what the respondent is personally ready to do (or doing at the moment) in order to somewhat improve the current situation or tackle the environmental crisis. The second part of the presentation made the audience familiar with the results of surveying high school students (9th, 10th and 11th graders) in order to determine the prevailing type of world view with regard to the «human–nature» relationship (anthropo-, bio-, or ecocentrism). For this purpose, the author designed a questionnaire consisting of 30 groups of statements with three alternatives to choose. In spring 2021, the questionnaire was pretested on a sample of 42 students from three different schools located in Poltava region and in the city of Kyiv. The data indicate a slight prevalence of an ecocentric world view, especially among the students from Poltava. This is probably because the school is currently engaged in environmental projects being implemented within that community.

Keywords: environmental issues, «human–nature» relationship, anthropo-, bio-, and ecocentrism, nationwide surveys, high school students