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Home as a Place for Shaping the Environmental Awareness of Poles

Dom jako miejsce kształtowania świadomości ekologicznej Polaków

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Abstract: Home is a place where young people grow up, learn and develop the skills necessary for effective participation in society. It is the place where attitudes, opinions, and behaviours of the youngest family members are formed, including those concerning the natural environment. The aim of the article is to explore the role of the family home – specifically the family – in shaping the environmental awareness of Poles. The topic presented in the article is based on the literature on the subject, as well as the results of research on issues related to the environmental awareness of Poles (e.g., CBOS, EcoBarometr, Report on the study of environmental awareness and behaviour of Polish residents 2022). The authors employed desk research to analyse existing data. Studies (EcoBarometr 2023; EcoBarometr 2024) reveal that the primary source of information on the natural environment is the media, rather than the family. For young people, the Internet is becoming the dominant source, while television becomes increasingly significant with age. The results of the research presented in the article also indicate that the vast majority of Poles engage in environmentally friendly activities within their households (e.g. waste segregation). However, the motivations for taking such actions are influenced not only by environmental concerns but also equally by economic considerations. The family environment is not a setting where discussions are a key tool for fostering environmental awareness of Poles. Neither home nor school, in the opinion of the respondents, is the main source of information about the natural environment. This highlights the need to emphasise the family's role in shaping young people's environmental attitudes and behaviors.

Keywords: home, family, environmental awareness, environmental protection

Streszczenie: Dom stanowi miejsce, w którym młodzi ludzie dorastają, uczą się i rozwijają kompetencje niezbędne do sprawnego funkcjonowania w społeczeństwie. To miejsce, w którym kształtowane są postawy, opinie i zachowania najmłodszych członków rodziny, dotyczące również środowiska naturalnego. Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie miejsca domu rodzinnego – rodziny w kontekście kształtowania świadomości ekologicznej Polaków. Prezentowany w artykule temat oparty został o literaturę przedmiotu, a także wyniki badań dotyczące problematyki odnoszącej się do świadomości ekologicznej Polaków (m.in. CBOS, EcoBarometr, Raport z badania świadomości i zachowań ekologicznych mieszkańców Polski 2022). Autorzy wykorzystali analizę danych zastanych w postaci desk research. Badania (EcoBarometr2023; EcoBarometr 2024) pokazują, iż głównym źródłem informacji dotyczącej środowiska naturalnego są media, nie zaś rodzina. W przypadku młodych ludzi głównym źródłem staje się Internet, a wraz z wiekiem wzrasta w tym zakresie znaczenie telewizji. Wyniki prezentowanych w artykule badań wskazują również na to, że zdecydowana większość Polaków podejmuje działania służące środowisku w obszarze domu rodzinnego (np. segregowanie śmieci). Jednakże motywacje do podejmo-

wania tego typu działań nie są wynikiem jedynie dbałości o środowisko, lecz w równym stopniu wynikają z przyczyn natury ekonomicznej. Rodzina nie stanowi środowiska, w którym rozmowa staje się podstawowym narzędziem kształtowania świadomości ekologicznej Polaków. Ani dom, ani szkoła w opinii badanych nie stanowią głównych źródeł informacji dotyczących środowiska naturalnego. Istotnym staje się zatem zwrócenie uwagi na znaczenie jakie środowisko rodzinne powinno odgrywać w sferze kształtowania postaw i zachowań ekologicznych młodych ludzi.

Słowa kluczowe: dom, rodzina, świadomość ekologiczna, ochrona środowiska

Introduction

Home is where individuals learn basic principles of communication, and acquire various skills necessary for satisfactory participation in society. Undoubtedly, the concept of home, regarded as the most important place on earth, is permanently and inextricably linked to human existence, development, and socialisation. Home serves as the centre of human life, where the inner world (home, family) intertwines and connects with the outer world through media, Internet access, and television (Duda 2017, 26; Krześcińska-Żach 2015, 286; Karkashadze, Kuprashvili, and Gugeshashvili 2023, 5).

Therefore, home is a place where individuals grow up, learn, and discover the world. It serves as a space for personal development, shaping attitudes and skills. When identified with the concept of family, home becomes a vital part in the cycle of human development, a place for raising young people. The home environment is where children grow up, learn, and acquire the skills and competencies necessary for active participation in various social groups (Chadderdon 1944, 301; Zhang, Lau and Su 2021, 275; Ładyżyński 2017, 12). This is a crucial place for fulfilling the needs of security, belonging, and self-image development (Campo et al. 2020, 299). The family home is also a place where environmental behaviours and attitudes are fostered. This is where young people learn through conversations, observation, and imitation of adult family members. They observe household rules, such as conserving water and electricity, segregating waste, and gain environmental knowledge by being part of nature. Knowledge acquired in the home

environment forms the foundation of environmental awareness, as opinions, thoughts, perspectives, views, beliefs, and patterns of behaviour are largely shaped by the environment in which individuals are born, grow, and develop. Therefore, environmental education is inextricably connected to home and family (Strumińska-Doktór 2006, 427; Grochowska 2006, 418-419).

The aim of the article is to explore the role of the family home in shaping the environmental awareness of Poles. Home is closely associated with family, as research shows that Poles primarily view the concept of home in connection with family, highlighting its central role in their understanding of the term (Duda and Podkowińska 2022, 96). Considering the importance of home in everyone's life and in the development and upbringing of young people, it is worth exploring its role in building environmental awareness.

1. Environmental Awareness of Poles

Awareness of the value of the environment and nature, along with understanding the damage caused by human activities to the ecosystems in which they live and function daily, can serve as a starting point for taking action to protect the environment (Agrawal et al. 2023, 3). Thus, it is worth examining the environmental awareness of Poles.

Environmental awareness, as a part of social awareness, is a multi-level and multi-dimensional concept with various definitions in the literature on the subject (Szostek 2012, 244; Koszarek-Cyra and Piśniak 2017, 194; Kowalska 2011, 386).

T. Burger highlights that environmental awareness encompasses a body of knowledge and beliefs about the natural environment, including perceptions of the relationships between its state and the living conditions and quality of life of individuals (Stefaniuk 2022, 361; Paško 2011, 132). In the literature on the subject, environmental awareness is often discussed through narrower and broader approaches (Fundali and Smolińska 2015, 41; Papuziński 2006, 34; Stefaniuk 2021, 362;). The narrower approach associates environmental awareness with knowledge, views and ideas about the environment. According to A. Papuziński, this approach is considered outdated, obsolete and one-sided, it overlooks the necessity of identifying and highlighting the relationship between humans (society) and nature. In a broad sense, environmental awareness is a form of social awareness reflected in people's thoughts and experiences, as well as in socially established norms for perceiving, experiencing and valuing nature. This perspective emphasises the significance of the relationship between society's economic activities and the processes of environmental devastation, destruction, and degradation (Papuziński 2006, 34). Environmental awareness may be understood as "an emerging form of social awareness, reflected in individual thoughts and experiences, as well as in standards for living, evaluating, and understanding elements of the biosphere. Environmental awareness requires challenging established patterns of thought, and redefining value systems, resulting in a significant shift in humanity's relationship with nature and the environment. This form of awareness reveals both our external identity, as seen by others, and what defines us internally. It fosters a sensitivity through which individuals can make ethical, everyday decisions, and develop subconscious habits that prevent the unintentional devastation of nature" (Kociszewska 2014, 35).

According to research by the Public Opinion Research Centre, concerns about

the natural environment are predominantly focused on global issues rather than local ones. Regarding their place of residence, a quarter of respondents in 2020 expressed high or very high levels of concern, while 46% indicated only a small degree of concern. However, it is worth noting that slightly more than a quarter of respondents indicated that the state of the natural environment was not a significant source of concern or anxiety. In 2011, nine years earlier, similar levels of concern about the local natural environment were reported, with 27% of respondents expressing high or very high concern and 47% expressing low concern. In 2018, less than one-third of Poles (32%) indicated very high or high concern about the local environment, while just over half (51%) expressed only minor concern (Omyła-Rudzka 2020, 1) – see Figure 1.

While the state of the natural environment in the local context is a cause for concern and anxiety to a very large or large extent for only one in four respondents, the vast majority of Poles voiced significant concerns about it nationally and globally. In 2020, slightly more than half of the respondents (53%) declared that the state of the natural environment in Poland is a cause for concern. As many as 70% of respondents expressed significant concern (to a very large or large extent) about the state of the natural environment globally, while fewer than one-fifth rated their level of concern as low. At the national level, even more respondents – over one-third – reported that the state of the natural environment in Poland was a cause for concern to a small extent. Notably, the differences in levels of concern between local and global contexts are evident not only in the proportion of respondents reporting high or very high anxiety but also in those reporting no concern. At the national level, 7% of respondents expressed no concerns about the natural environment, compared to 4% in the global context. It is also worth noting that, compared to 2018, fewer Poles expressed concerns about the natural

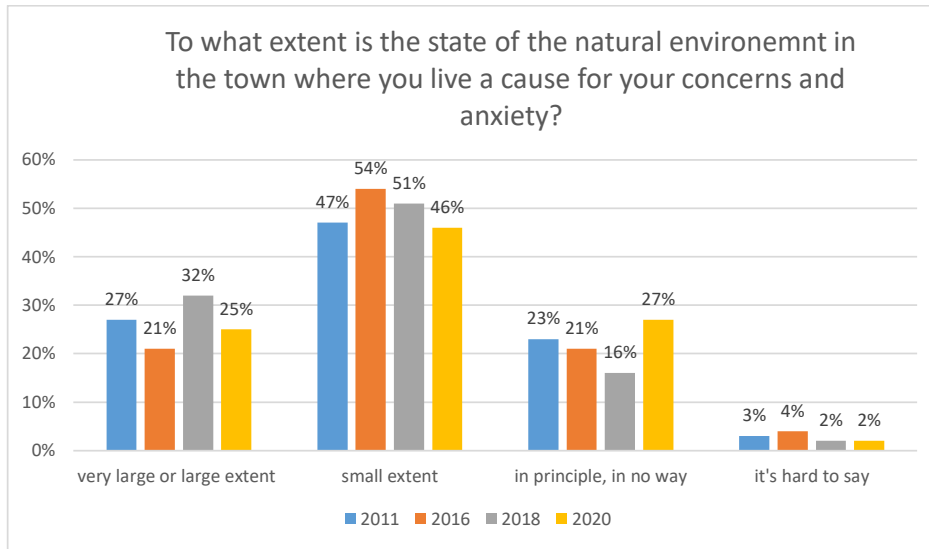


Figure 1. Concerns of Poles regarding the state of the natural environment in their place of residence. Source: Based on: Omyła-Rudzka 2020, 1

environment in the global context. In 2018, as many as 68% of respondents indicated that the state of the natural environment in Poland raised concerns to a very large and large extent, while 79% expressed similar concerns about the global environment (Omyła-Rudzka 2020, 1-2). The differences – fifteen percentage points in the national context, nine points in the global context, and seven points in the local context – may be attributed to the pandemic and the fears it generated, particularly regarding the SARS-CoV-2 virus. This study, conducted between 28 September and 8 October 2020, involved a sample of 1,133 individuals during a challenging period characterised by uncertainty, fear, and anxiety about the unknown – see Figure 2.

Notably, the peak levels of fear and anxiety regarding the state of the natural environment in Poland were reported about a quarter of a century ago. In 1993, 78% of respondents expressed such concerns to a very large or large extent, with 71% reporting the same in 1997 (Omyła-Rudzka 2020, 2).

Based on the findings showing that Poles express greater fear and anxiety about the natural environment globally

compared to locally, it is important to highlight that this may be due to a more positive perception of the natural environment in their place of residence. Further studies conducted between 13 and 17 November 2022 (on a sample of 1,000 Polish residents) show that people evaluate the condition of the natural environment in their place of residence more favorably than at the national level. Poles have consistently held this assessment since 2011. As of now, one-fifth of respondents rate the state of the environment in Poland as good (6% definitely good, 14% good), whereas slightly less than half (45%) rate their local environment positively (including 20% as very good and 25% as good). Notably, more than one-third of respondents assess the state of the national environment negatively (23% rather bad, 13% definitely bad), and 43% of respondents were undecided (stating it is difficult to say). Regarding the condition of the environment in their area of residence, 30% of respondents had no opinion (stated “difficult to say”), while 23% evaluated its condition negatively (14% as rather bad and 9% as definitely bad) (Report on the study

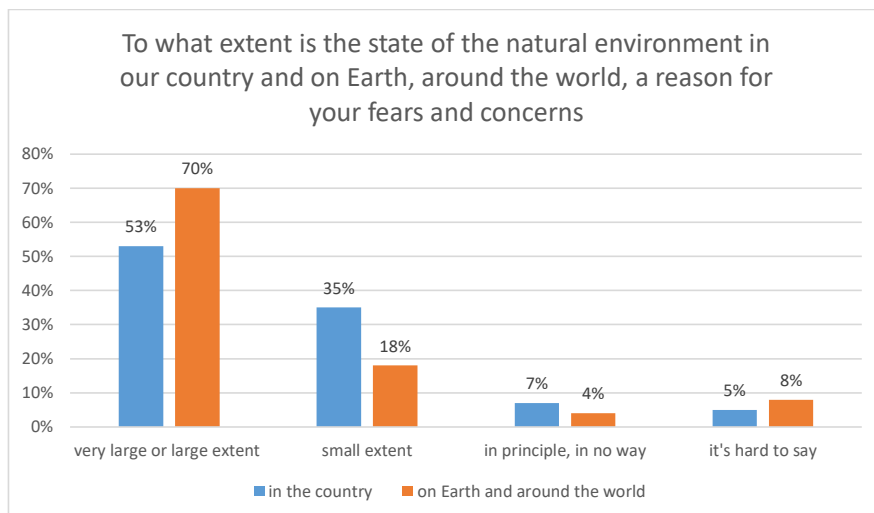


Figure 2. Concerns of Poles regarding the state of the natural environment in Poland and globally in 2020. Source: Based on: Omyła-Rudzka 2020, 2

of environmental awareness and behaviour of Polish residents 2022).

In the context of environmental awareness, it is important to consider the position of environmental protection within the hierarchy of various societal challenges. According to the surveyed Polish residents, the most pressing areas of concern are health care (52%), education and upbringing (31%), and justice and energy security (each cited by 30% of respondents). Environmental protection ranked fifth, mentioned by less than one in four respondents (24%) (Report on the study of environmental awareness and behaviour of Polish residents 2022).

Regarding problems related to environmental protection, a clear shift is observed in respondents' views compared to two years ago. In 2020, over half (52%) of respondents highlighted environmental protection, making it the most problematic issue in Poland. By 2022, however, the percentage dropped by half. In contrast, energy security saw a 21-point rise (from 9% in 2020 to 30% in 2022) (Report on the study of environmental awareness and behaviour of Polish residents 2022). Although there was a significant drop in responses regarding environmental

protection, it is worth emphasising that, among the 15 areas identified by respondents, environmental protection remains one of the country's most challenging issues to address.

When considering environmental protection, it is important to note the major issues identified by Poles. In both 2022 and 2020, the top three concerns were air pollution (56% in 2022; 59% in 2020), waste management (51% in 2022; 50% in 2020), and water pollution (42% in 2022; 34% in 2020). While there was a slight decrease (three percentage points) for air pollution, other environmental concerns in Poland saw an increase in mentions in 2022. A significant increase – by over twenty percentage points – was recorded for climate change (+22%) and low water resources (+21%), with the difference for climate change rising by fifteen percentage points (19% in 2022 compared to 4% in 2020). (Report on the study of environmental awareness and behaviour of Polish residents 2022).

The latest research conducted in 2024 (N=1500) reveals that the vast majority of Poles recognise the importance of the natural environment. While nearly

three-quarters of respondents (72%) view the current state of the environment as a major problem today, almost a quarter (24%) believe that the Earth is doing well and that no environmental actions are necessary (EcoBarometr.pl 2024). Furthermore, as many as 40% of respondents indicated that they grew weary of the topic of environmental and ecological issues, and nearly half (49%) reported doubts about the effectiveness of current environmental actions and a lack of sufficient green options in stores. Slightly fewer respondents (44%) admitted difficulty in fully abandoning convenient but less environmentally friendly solutions (e.g. exclusively using public transport). Additionally, as many as 61% of respondents stated that they cannot afford more expensive sustainable products or services (EcoBarometr 2024).

2. The Role of the Family in Shaping the Environmental Behaviours and Attitudes of Household Members

Family can be considered as an important source of information about ecology, nature, and the natural environment. Attitudes towards nature, environmental protection, and related views are shaped, among other factors, within the family environment.

From this perspective, it is noteworthy that the most common reason Poles believe the natural environment should be protected and cared for is concern for future generations and health (Report on the study of environmental awareness and behaviour of Polish residents 2022).

For Poles, the most important values remain consistent over the years: health (72% in 2024; 79% in 2023; 74% in 2022; 81% in 2021), family (69% in 2024; 77% in 2023; 69% in 2022; 80% in 2021), love (57% in 2024; 66% in 2023; 61% in 2022; 70% in 2021), and safety (57% in 2024; 64% in 2023; 62% in 2022; 66% in 2021). Interestingly, in 2022, love dropped to fourth place, ranking just behind safety. Values such as environmental protection (33% in 2023; 32% in 2022; 40% in 2021), ecology (30% in 2023; 26% in 2022; 31% in

2021), and sustainable development (20% in 2023; 19% in 2022; 18% in 2021) ranked lower in importance. Research conducted in 2024 indicates that values deemed more important than environmental protection include health, family, love, safety, freedom, truth and honesty, trust, friendship, justice, responsibility, loyalty, personal development, tolerance, knowledge and education, and social justice. Additionally, values considered more important than ecology but less important than environmental protection include the right to life, convenience and comfort in life, patriotism, homeland, satisfaction, and harmony (EcoBarometr 2023; EcoBarometr 2024).

Home, closely associated with family, is undoubtedly one of the most important values for individuals. Although family and family home play a crucial role in the development of children and youth, particularly in upbringing and acquiring knowledge about the world, the percentage of Poles who frequently discuss ecological and environmental topics with their family and friends remains relatively low (37% in 2024; 39% in 2023). In 2024, there was a slight decrease in the number of respondents confirming conversations with family and friends on topics related to the environment (EcoBarometr 2024). Similarly, other studies indicate that family is not the primary source of information about the natural environment. In this context, the media plays a significant role. In 2022, nearly three-quarters of respondents (74%) reported obtaining information about the natural environment primarily from the Internet, while slightly more than half (52%) cited television as their main source. The third most frequently indicated source is the press (22%). One in five respondents identified the radio as a source of information about the natural environment. Family and friends ranked fifth (18%), followed by social campaigns (16%), books (11%), product packaging (6%), and schools/universities (5%). However, it is worth noting that mentions of family and friends as a source of information increased by six percentage

points compared to 2020 (Report on the study of environmental awareness and behaviour of Polish residents 2022).

In the context of family as a source of information about the natural environment, it is notable that while only 18% of respondents indicated this source, the largest group among them was young people. One in four young people aged 25-34 cited family as a source, while the percentage was highest among those aged 15-24, reaching 28%. However, the Internet remains the dominant source of information for young people aged 15-24 (97%) and those aged 25-34 (89%), as well as for respondents aged 35-44 (83%). For the oldest age group (60+), television is the primary source of information (70%), though more than half of this group also use the Internet (56%). Family and friends are not considered a significant source of information for people aged 45 and older, with only 15% of those aged 45-59 and 14% of those aged 60+ indicating it. Among respondents aged 35-44, the percentage citing family as a source (18%) was equal to those indicating the press (28%) but lower than those citing social campaigns (23%). For young people aged 15-24, family and friends rank third as a source of information about the natural environment, following the Internet (97%) and television (31%). The difference between television and family in this group is minimal, at just three percentage points. Family and friends also ranked higher than school/university (24%) in this age group (Report on the study of environmental awareness and behaviour of Polish residents 2022).

An important aspect of shaping the environmental awareness of Poles is determining who holds responsibility for fostering eco-friendly attitudes and behaviors. Research shows that Poles believe this responsibility primarily lies with individuals (44%), followed by schools (38%). The family ranked third (31%), tied with central authorities and the government (31%), and ahead of local and provincial authorities by nine percentage points and the media by twentyone

percentage points. Non-governmental organisations and housing/neighbourhood communities received minimal mentions, at 4% and 3%, respectively (Report on the study of environmental awareness and behaviour of Polish residents 2022). The findings indicate that while family and friends are not seen as the main source of information about the natural environment (18%), nearly one-third of respondents view the family as responsible for shaping eco-friendly attitudes and behaviors. It is noteworthy that schools are considered an even more critical space for fostering these attitudes than the family. However, in the same survey, Poles did not regard schools as a significant source of information about the natural environment, with only 5% of respondents citing them.

Conclusion

Home is a key environment where competencies, views and opinions on various topics are shaped. Interpersonal communication remains one of the primary ways young people obtain information, learn, and understand the perspectives of other household members. Conversations with close family members are essential in shaping and raising young people. However, in the context of acquiring information about the natural environment, the modern home and family are no longer the primary sources for young people. Instead, the Internet plays the leading role.

When considering the development of environmental awareness, examples set by adult household members – through their actions and decisions – are just as important as verbal communication. Children also learn by imitating their parents. Caregivers and older family members serve as role models, demonstrating through their daily behaviour how to act, speak, and behave. These “home customs” created within the family hold a crucial place in the upbringing and development of children and youth (Śnieżyński 2019, 50-51;

Kopeć 2014, 116; Stępień-Słodkowska et al. 2018, 70).

Research shows that modern homes in Poland are places where the vast majority of people engage in such practices as sorting waste, turning off lights and unused devices when leaving the house, and buying products more thoughtfully to avoid waste. In 2023, slightly more than four-fifths of respondents reported engaging in these actions (84% sorted waste, and 83% turned off lights and unused equipment when leaving the house). Additionally, 11% of respondents declared their intention to adopt such habits (EcoBarometr 2023). Other studies reveal that 77.8% of young people report having containers for waste sorting in their homes, while less than a quarter (22.2%) state that they do not have such containers at home (Stępień-Słodkowska et al. 2018, 68).

An important issue is the motivation behind environmentally friendly actions in the home (such as waste separation and reviewing product stock to avoid unnecessary purchases), as well as actions related to shopping, such as reducing plastic use by bringing reusable bags. Unfortunately, environmental concerns – the desire to care for the environment – is neither the sole nor primary motivation for these actions. In 2023, only 2% of respondents, and 3% in 2024, identified environmental concerns – the desire to care for the environment – as their main motivation for taking such actions. A slightly higher percentage (7% in 2023 and 9% in 2024) cited environmental concerns as their primary motivation in most cases, but with economics as a secondary factor. More than one-third of respondents (38% in 2023 and 36% in 2024) viewed economics and environmental concerns as equally important motivators. Meanwhile, 28% in 2023 and 30% in 2024 indicated economics as the primary motivation, with environmental concerns as a secondary factor. Finally, slightly less than a quarter (24% in 2023 and 22% in 2024) stated that economics – seeking savings – was their sole motivation (EcoBarometr 2024). These

findings highlight that environmental awareness is not the sole driver of environmentally friendly behaviours. Both a desire to care for the environment and economic considerations play similarly significant roles in influencing respondents' actions.

The above research results indicate that the family, like schools, is not the primary source of information about the natural environment. While most households take steps to protect and care for the environment, these actions are often motivated by a combination of environmental and economic factors rather than environmental concerns alone.

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